

## 3

# Importance of Family Life Education

\* Teresa Chacko

### Introduction

In the last chapter we discussed the concept, meaning and need of family life education. In the concluding part of the lesson we also discussed the advantages of family life education. But the question which arises is: *What is family life education and for whom is it intended?* Initially family life education was started informally as people's response to a felt need though, informally this education existed in society as part of social life. Ironically, family life education is a field which came into being as a result of public demand although it still has to fight for public acceptance as a field of education. Some people still hold the idea that families are private and should not be intruded upon while others maintain an independent stance arguing that they do not need to learn how to be better parents, partners or family members. They claim to know it all instinctively. But there is a positive change in attitude practically everywhere in the world, especially since the late nineteen seventies. People are finding it a necessity due to rapid social change that has occurred within various sections of the society. So there is a need for equal participation from family and community to make it more effective. Before we discuss the broad objectives of family life education, we should know the operating principles of family life education.

---

\* Prof. Teresa Chacko, Kalloor House, Cochin

**The Operational Principles of Family Life Education**

Family life education has certain operational principles. Let us list them one by one.

- 1) Family Life Education is related to individuals in the families throughout the life span, both as individuals and families.
- 2) Family Life Education should be based on the need of individuals in families.
- 3) Family Life Education is a multidisciplinary area of a study and practice.
- 4) Family life Education takes an educational rather than a therapeutic approach.
- 5) Family Life Education should present and respect differing family values.

**Objectives of Family Life Education**

Family life education is concerned with assisting prospective candidates for learning the process of living in the family, continuing family life to the next generation and sustaining the social, cultural, religious and traditional practices and values. The major objectives of family life education are:

- 1) To develop knowledge regarding the concept of family, its roles and functions: Every individual (both young and old) should have proper knowledge and understanding of the concept of family, its roles and functions. This knowledge will help an individual to recognize the various tasks that need to be undertaken for the well being and maintenance of the family.
- 2) Family life education aims at developing the ability to deal with family relationship and responsibility of family life education helps in establishing and

maintaining satisfying relationships with members of the family, with friends and with others whom they come into contact with in the context of family life.

- 3) Family life education aims at developing life skills to cope with different situations: Family life education develops the knowledge, values and skills necessary for adult life, marriage, parenthood and participation in the social life of a community. It also helps in communicating effectively with others and in making wise decisions about all matters related to family life, personal relationships and dealing with various members of the community.
- 4) Family life education aims at helping in understanding and coping with changes in one's own life and changes in the society: Family life education helps an individual to understand and cope with changes in the adolescent life and cope with the society in which one lives. Changes in society are occurring all the time and particularly the breaking down of traditional social structures and the changing roles of men and women due to marriage, education, employment undertaken by women and such like phenomena.
- 5) Family life education aims at developing knowledge about physiological processes in one's own body especially the process of human conception and birth. It also creates an awareness regarding the consequences of adolescent pregnancies and parenting and of alternatives to pregnancies and contraception.
- 6) Family life education seeks to create responsible and useful young citizens. The ultimate aim of family life education is to create responsible and productive young citizens by helping them to achieve the above mentioned objectives.

**Specific Objectives of family life education**

The specific objectives of each of the components of family life education are illustrated below:

<b>Components</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
1) Concept of family types and purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) To identify the historical functions of a family and its varying structure;</li> <li>b) To define the term family;</li> <li>c) To identify various types of families;</li> <li>d) To enumerate the functions of the family</li> </ul>
2) Family relationship and responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) To explore the concept relationship;</li> <li>b) To identify rights and responsibilities in the family;</li> <li>c) To understand the factor that affect family relationship;</li> <li>d) To cite common conflicts that arise in the family;</li> <li>e) To identify the causes arising from differences among individuals;</li> <li>f) To recognize the various tasks that need to be undertaken for the well-being and maintenance of the family.</li> </ul>

- 3) Family life cycle To understand the various stages of family life cycle.
- 4) Family needs and resources
  - a) To identify events in the life of a large family and to determine the stages that place heavy demands on the family resources;
  - b) To understand the basic family needs and to identify the resources available to achieve them;
  - c) To understand the impact of family size on the basic needs of family members;
  - d) To develop skills for budgeting and managing family economy
- 5) Marriage
  - a) To understand the marriage customs, laws, norms and practices under various cultures;
  - b) To understand the concept of marriage and the responsibilities associated with marriage.
- 6) Responsible parenthood
  - a) To understand the roles and responsibilities;
  - b) To appreciate the responsibilities involved in having children.
  - c) To be able to explore and acknowledge the youths'

attitudes and values concerning parenting;

- d) To discuss the concept and importance of family planning and the advantages of practicing family planning.
- e) To identify the different methods of birth control, their effectiveness, side effects and safety.

**Source:** Family life Education: Package One, UNESCO, PROAP, Bangkok, 1988.

### **Importance of Family Life Education**

The following reasons can be offered to indicate the importance of Family Life Education in today's world:

- 1) **Expectations of marriage and family life are changing:** When marriage was for economic security and husbands rule the roost, the rules were more simple and straightforward. Expectations for affection were minimal as were options outside marriage. Today, love, companionship and equality are very important, communication and problem-solving skills have become even more valuable for happiness.
- 2) **Terms of marriage and family are changing:** At the turn of the century, the life span was shorter, more of marriage revolved around parenting, and couples often drew on the network of family and friend for support. Today, with nuclear families being on the increase in our country, couples are expected to meet their own needs, with minimal extended family support, and coordinate adult growth and roles through 50-60 years.

- 3) **Life doesn't prepare most persons for new family roles:** Couples face more demands and fewer supports, but few persons learn to be mature and be equal partners in families. Conflict resolution and problem-solving skills are part of many job-trainings and volunteer groups, yet couple communication remains sorely neglected. Traditional education prepares a person for 8 hours of his/her working life. A person is actually functioning as a member of a family with an assigned role for a much longer part of the day. What preparation does one receive for this formidable and important role ?.
- 4) **Benefits of happy family life and adjustment:** Research finds happy families have lower rates of illness, depression, and conflict in and outside their marriage. Well-adjusted partners make easier transitions to parenting and tend to be more supportive parents. For most persons, marital satisfaction is the best index of family satisfaction; Family satisfaction is the best prediction of well-being.
- 5) **Consequences of marital breakdowns:** Whether divorced or living under the same roof and being completely separated from each other emotionally, partners, their children, and their relatives experience emotional and financial stress which may have long-term effects. In particular, poverty, continued partner conflict, and isolation from old friends and family can limit the horizon of couples in stress and of their children. Most persons would choose to avoid families where there is no harmony or peace, or take advantage of this situation.
- 6) **Benefits of family life education:** Researchers have successfully shown the benefits of training programmes in relation to increased couples' skills and satisfaction for long-term, lowered marital

conflict rates, and reduced family violence rates.

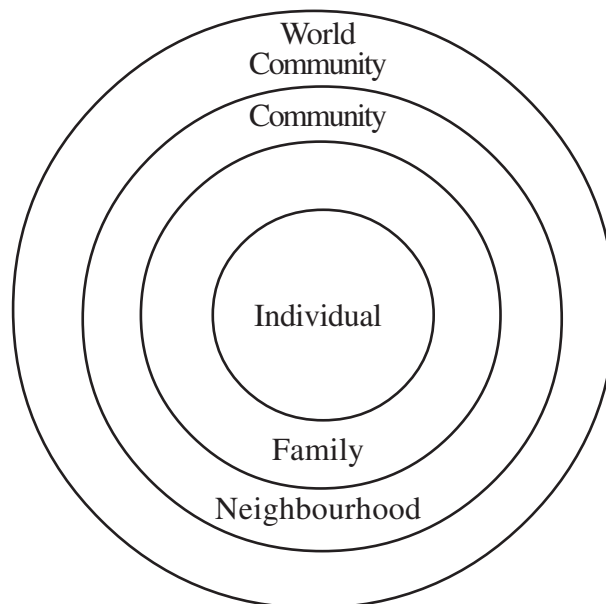
- 7) **Starting early prevents breakdowns:** Couples who are aware of the principles of family dynamics, of problem solving methods, and of the support and skill resources, become more aware and more capable of handling the challenges of family life. Proactive couples tend to avoid relationship-treating crises and enjoy the benefits of life together.
- 8) **The pandemic of HIV/AIDS:** One of the salutary side effects the otherwise disastrous pandemic of HIV/AIDS is that it helps us to turn our attention once again to the values of love, marital fidelity, etc. which are the bedrock of the institution of family. Though AIDS spread is not only through sexual relations, it must be admitted that in a majority of cases sexual contact is the main source of infection. Marital fidelity has, thus, the added advantage of also preventing a lot of infection. It is to be noted, that it is not HIV/AIDS pandemic that makes marital fidelity a value. It has been a value which was the basis of the institution called family, and now in the context of HIV/AIDS we get the motivation to reflect on this important value once again.

Society is the name for group of people who live together. A society is composed of many different types of organizations and institutions and family is one of them. In fact the family is the primary unit which constitutes society. Family, community and society are regarded as special dynamic institutions which interact among themselves. It is the society which decides the quality and types of family. It depends on the healthiness of the family to create a vibrant and progressive nation and society. Again, family consists of individuals. So it is necessary to develop healthiness and proper understanding among each individual to make a family vibrant and progressive. So the individual is the basic



entity in a family. Family, community and society are dynamic in the sense that with the changes in outer world, its economics and history of these institutions are being constantly redefined and the boundaries are being constantly readjusted. A healthy society or community is one large cohesive family. Family is a microcosm of society or community possessing all the culture and civilization it has acquired.

This can be best defined by the concentric diagram given below. This model shows



that the individual is the cornerstone of the world community. This is because s/he is the essential constituent part of family, neighbourhood, community, society, nation and of world community at large. So any change in the individual's attitude and behaviour affects all these above institutions. Simultaneously, any change in the large institutions like neighbourhood, community, nation and world community will affect the individual too. So it is pertinent that roles of all these institutions are crucial as far as family life

education is concerned. Each institution has to play specific roles to keep harmony among themselves and in the world community.

## **Role of Individual, Family and Community in Family Life Education**

Let us now turn our attention to understand the importance of an individual, family and of community from the family education point of view.

### **Individual**

Family life education focuses on how individuals as constituent parts and fruits of family life may become physically healthy, emotionally mature, disciplined, responsible and tolerant human beings. Its goal is to help individuals develop interpersonal skills and more enriching human relationships by learning how to relate effectively within their families. As a whole it seeks to improve the quality of their life throughout the entire range of human developments.

Human beings perform different roles (like that of husband, wife, parent-child) and functions (like child care and development, family resource management, family planning). That is why the same individual is supposed to know about all these aspects, their prospects and consequences. All these needs can be categorized under different headings. An individual may have various types of needs. Some needs may be the felt needs of an individual in a concrete situation in life. For example, an individual may feel: "I need to be more assertive in my life relationships". The second type of needs are "developmental needs" which are common to most individuals as they grow and get matured (for example, dealing with one's changing sexuality at puberty, preparing for retirement as the age advances). These needs are generally identified through empirical studies and through collective wisdom and experience of mankind.

In many cases there is an overlap between these two kinds of needs. The educational needs of new parents, for example, may be both felt need expressed by the parents themselves and a developmental need emerging from their new roles and responsibilities.

There is another category of needs that deserves special attention which is called "societal needs". These are needs which emerge from current and anticipated social, economic and political conditions that impinge in important ways on the lives of all individuals. For example, the pace of social change in most societies dictates a need to redefine the roles of adult family members. Where traditions once established the norms for family behaviour, parents are now being challenged to examine their role and to accommodate the demands of changing family structures and functions. The state also has shown an increasing tendency to intervene in family life for reasons of economic and social necessity. National programmes of planned parenthood, for example, have been established in a number of countries to curtail population growth and to promote improved standards of living. The belief, that parenting skills, knowledge, and attitude can be learned through programmes of education as opposed to learning from one generation to another has given rise to a host of such programmes around the world.

### **Role of Family**

Without the role of family, one cannot think of family life education. Individuals usually perform certain functions within the family which is not possible for them to perform outside the family. In other words, family promotes certain functions amongst individuals. These functions are discussed below in relation to their role in Family Life Education.

#### **1) Biological Functions**

The husband and wife have the right to sexual expression as a way of sharing or showing their love for

each other. This provides not only sexual gratification for the spouses but also strengthens their interpersonal relation, love and unity as a result of the powerful and often binding emotions which accompany sexual activities a husband and wife. The sexual functions also help to stabilize the society. The family provides opportunities in which sexual drives find both expression as well as control. Parenting also has long term functions as a child is extremely helpless and dependent on its parents for food and shelter for a number of years.

## **2) Cultural Functions**

Family helps the child to acquire values, beliefs, customs and traditions of the society. It is in the family that the child's basic attitudes develop. If puja is performed in a family in the morning, then children also learn and acquire this value of prayer and religiosity. What a child considers right or wrong largely depends on what the family believes in and puts to practice. They may, later on in their lives, question these values and family traditions. It is in the context of this questioning that a child develops its own value system for life.

## **3) Economic Functions**

There is a concept of optimum utilization of income and labour. Families pool their resources so that they can have maximum satisfaction by budgeting efficiently. This economic co-operation within the family not only goes a long way towards fulfilling the economic function for society as a whole, but provides "rewarding experiences for the spouses working together which cement their union to work towards family goals such as providing good education, health and comforts to their children. Families sometimes decide to supplement family income through various ways such as wife's employment, business to maintain the social status of the family.

## **4) Emotional Psychological Functions**

Human beings are emotionally and psychologically sensitive and need the family to recharge themselves

for their struggle in the world. In times of crisis particularly, the family works as a shock absorber, provides stability and anchors the members emotionally. The picture of family is one of inclusion and of caring. One can quit his/ her job, drop out of school, and move to another city or village, but the family is always at the back to provide support. Adolescents, children and unemployed youth are supported by the family so that they do not lose heart and go astray. The family acts as a compensatory agency which offers comfort and esteem to the worker who returns from the factory or office tired dissatisfied and without being able to exercise any control. With the changing family values and norms, members sometimes do not find the required support from it. Those who consider their own family as a "problem family" should learn to understand the root cause of the problems in the family and to try to work on them to resolve them, through shared feelings.

#### **5) Educational Function**

Beginning with toilet training, language skills, or socially acceptable behaviour, a family performs the important functions of education of children and their socialization. Vocational skills of varying nature are also learnt at times within the family. Basic education is given by the family. This training makes a child quick to learn in school and enables him/her to cope with the demands of schooling along with his/her classmates. Within the family the child learns to conform and to submit to authority. It also learns to negotiate with authority.

#### **6) Cosmic Function**

Man feels adrift in the large impersonal universe. He becomes largely alienated in the industrialized and urban society. Living in a family helps to give him/her a place in the cosmos that makes him feel connected to others and rooted to earth.

**Community**

MacIver defines community as “an area of social living marked by some degree of social coherence”. We know that a person rarely exists alone. S/he is linked in many ways to his fellow human being who form a group. S/he can establish relations only with the people who reside near him/her in a definite part of the territory. It is a fact that people who reside in a particular locality over a length of time, develop social likeness, have common social ideas, common traditions and a sense of belonging . This social interaction in a common specific area gives birth to community. These above mentioned aspects of community help in providing and preserving family life education.

Let us now examine the three specific roles performed by community which are very important from the family life education point of view.

**1) Community acts as preserver of values related to family life**

Each older generation passes on values related to family life acquired from their previous generation to each successive younger generation. That becomes a set pattern or tradition in the communities. This way, age old traditions and values still prevail in communities and societies. Sometimes we find that these values are little bit modified according to the changes taking place in societies. It may be either in the form of parents or grand parents vis-as-vis their respective children or grand children or in the form of sermons by religious or community leaders.

**2) Community act as a resistant**

Not only does community preserve values related to family life but it also resists when there is any violation of the norms or values. It imposes certain restrictions or takes action against the individual who violates the

norms and values. Other than this, a community may take strict measures like non-cooperation and boycotting the individual and groups who tend to violate the values and norms.

### **3) Community provides moral policing**

Another significant point is that a community always tries to provide guidelines to the members regarding what to do and what not to do. It keeps an eye on each member's actions in the community or outside the community. In this way it keeps checks and balances in the community.

As far as a community is concerned, there are three major settings currently which offer family life education for adults: religious, social and professional organizations, mass media; and schools and universities.

#### **i) Role of religious, social and professional organizations**

The most comprehensive programs in educating for family living have been developed and implemented by religious and secular organizations. Hundreds of diverse organizations and agencies are involved in offering a wide array of courses, workshops, and services covering areas such as parent education, marriage preparation, marriage enrichment and child development. Traditionally invested with a belief in marriage and the family, the church is one institution in western society which encompasses all families and whose clientele spans the entire life cycle from birth to death. Many religious groups are involved in matters relevant to the well-being of families. Besides religious denominations, there are community organizations such as the Young Men's Christians Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christians Association (YWCA) and Service Association of America as well as voluntary organizations that include a focus on

family education in the form of courses and workshops offered to adults on issues related to marriage and family living.

Most countries have developed organizations to deal with their particular concerns in family life education. These often grow out of professional associations having a special interest in the family or government agencies giving leadership to educational, social and health concerns of the family. Some examples include the International Union of Family Organizations. (France), the National Council on Family Relations (USA), the Study commission on Family (UK) and the Vanier Institute of the Family (Canada) Apart from these organizations, many international agencies also sponsor this type of work. These organizations are UNESCO, International Red Cross Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE)

ii) **Role of mass media in promoting community attitude**

There continues to be a great public influence exerted by television, radio, news paper and magazines on moulding the values, ideas, attitudes and beliefs about marital and family living. While the quality of input may be at times questioned, they nonetheless offer alternative structures, role models and information and advice on a wide range of family-related issues.

iii) **Role of schools and universities in providing family life education as a part of community education**

Schools have for sometime been introducing more and more learning opportunities for students on marriage and family issues. Many universities and



colleges offer credit and non -credit continuing education programmes on marriage and family for adults.

There is a need for an integrated effort or coherence between family and community. If there is a difference between what is observed in the family and what is practiced in the community, then there will be crisis in individuals mental level or way of life. To avoid that there is need for orientation of community leaders. These leaders may be political leader from Panchayat level up to the national level, religious leaders of all religions and social leaders. These are the persons who plan and execute all the decisions which are relevant from the viewpoint of family life education.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have discussed various broad and specific objectives of family life education. Major objectives are to develop good knowledge about family roles and functions, develop the knowledge, values and skills necessary for adult life, marriage and parenthood. The ultimate aim of family life education is to create responsible and useful young citizens by upgrading the above mentioned skills. To develop all this knowledge, values and skills various institutions like a family, a community and individuals have different roles and responsibilities to perform. An individual has to perform different functions and roles and simultaneously has to satisfy different needs. Like the individual, a family also performs various functions including biological, cultural, economic, emotional, psychological, educational, and cosmic functions. The community acts as a preserver and provider of family life education and provides resistance to those persons who violate its values and norms. It provides moral policing. As far as a community is concerned, there are three major settings which correctly offer family life education;

religious, social professional organizations; mass media, and school and universities.

## References

Areus, M.E Schvaneveldt, J.D, Moss J.J. (eds) (1993), *Handbook of Family Life Education* (Foundation of Family Life Education), Saga Publications Vol. 1, Vol. 2.

Ceshadri.C. and Pandey J.L, *Population Education – A National Source Book*, NCERT, New Delhi.

International Planned Parenthood Association (1985), *Growing Up in a Chaning World*. Part One: (Youth Organisation and Family Life Education), An introduction, IPPF, London.

Thomas, Gracious (1995), *AIDS and Family Education*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi.

UNESCO (1988), *Family Life Education: Package One*, PROAP, Bangkok.