

Special Educational Needs of Autistic Children

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This paper aims to explore the avenues for providing special educational services to the mentally handicapped children who live in rural areas of India.

Two of the most problematic syndromes of developmental psychopathology are childhood schizophrenia and infantile autism [1]. To date, attention had been paid to the establishment of criterial features of behaviours most salient for each syndrome; the social isolation, aberrant and delayed speech of Autists [2].

It is well known that more than 80% -out of the 78 million population of India live in rural areas. Prior to attempting to provide special educational facilities or rehabilitation facilities to the bulk of mentally handicapped persons, one should be aware of the fact that the bulk of the mentally handicapped persons live in villages and small towns of this country where the special educational facilities are close to nil.

There is a need to explore the effective ways of integrating autistic children into the main stream education. With the scattered population of mentally handicapped persons, especially in villages, it is rather difficult to start separate individual services to different types of handicaps. Thus it could be useful to have trained peripatetic teachers for a cluster of villages who shall guide and assist classroom teachers in the ordinary schools. It demands a careful study of the needs of the parents of the handicapped children in organising peripatetic services.

Whatever may be the "myth" surrounding the parents of autistic children they should be seen as active partners in the education of their children. Self help groups for parents of mentally handicapped persons which are functioning in Bangalore city and neighbouring rural areas of Karnataka State is serving as a focal point in taking services into the rural areas of this country. Such groups aim to help parents to educate and manage their children with minimal professional help.

These groups would meet once, twice or sometimes daily. Such groups also serve as centres for early intervention.

The common features of these groups are; parents of the handicapped children meet periodically to discuss about the social and educational problems. Parents select a target behaviour and work on it during the rest of the week. The parents would choose four target behaviours in the following areas:

1. Self-help
2. Cognitive
3. Language and
4. Socialization.

Parents receive professional guidance in the individual educational programme and monitor the progress.

It is not an easy task to take services into rural areas of India. The geographic immensity of this country, the scattered population of handicapped, limited resources and lack of adequately trained oriented personnel makes the problem a challenging one. The one natural resource that is available in abundance to provide special educational services to the mentally handicapped need to be channeled and utilised adequately. Thus the self-help group model may be considered as

an alternative approach to the rehabilitations and hope to take the rehabilitation measures to the needy children of our villages.

1. Waterhouse L & Fein D, Developmental trends in cognitive skills for children diagnosed as autistic and schizophrenic

Journal of Child Development Page: 55: 236-244, 1984

2. Rutter M, Conceptions of autism: A review of research

Journal of Child Development Psychology and Psychiatry Page: 9: 1-25, 1968
