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OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING IN CHILDHOOD: HOW FAMILY BEHAVIORS SHAPE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Childhood is the most formative phase of a human life when one acquires behaviour, attitudes, emotions, social values and the skill to interact in the social environment which influences an individual's whole life till adulthood. Among many agents of socialization, family is of peculiar importance to the child because it serves as first and the most important learning environment throughout an individual's childhood. Children are constantly watching the behavioural activities of their parent, siblings, grandparents and every member of their family, and learning behaviours, emotional expression and behaviours by observation. This helps them build behaviour, emotion and in their social adjustments. Therefore, learning in this phase of life in any given environment through observation learning in a family lead in the developing and formulation of the social behaviour of a person.

This research paper studies the impact of the behaviour in a family on the overall social and emotional development of the children through the mechanism of observational learning. Relying on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory;¹ using literature² from the field of developmental psychology, sociology, education, law and child rights, this study analyses how children's constructive and dysfunctional behaviours are learnt by observation of family and parenting strategies, the manner in which emotion between the family member interact, the interrelationship within a family members, family living environment and contemporary

¹ Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory 22–29 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977).

² Diana E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds & Ruth Duskin Feldman, Human Development 25–38 (12th ed. McGraw-Hill Educ. 2012).

changing societal pattern. It also considers how children are learning and behaviour is influenced due to various changed structure of family such as the changing family setup.

With the research and analytical approach, this paper analyses the interplay of the psychological theories of learning and the legal frameworks established for safeguarding the holistic developmental interests of the children. It underlines the critical significance of the constitutional principles,³ child welfare legislations, educational practices, and international child right documents that foster family environments that encourage role modelling. It argues that observational learning should not be viewed merely as a psychological phenomenon but as an instrument with social and legal dimensions because the behaviour pattern learnt in the childhood influences social conduct, future Civic behaviour, relations of adult in community.

As one of the most significant determinates, that the behavioural patterns of family influence the most to the social and emotional development of the children; the role of the positive parental behaviour cultivates an empathetic, courageous and principled personality but however, the negative behavioural examples from family significantly affect overall developmental prospects even throughout life; thus promoting positive parental behavioural norms, creating awareness, and reinforcing social legal & educational support is fundamental to meet the objectives of developing a socially adjusted, emotionally sound, resilient, empathetic and an ethical individual.

Keywords: Observational Learning; Childhood Development; Family Behaviour; Social and Emotional Development; Albert Bandura; Social Learning Theory; Child Psychology; Parenting; Family Environment; Child Rights; Developmental Psychology; Socialization

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is universally recognized as the most significant and formative stage of human existence, the period when the foundational framework of an individual's personality, behaviour, emotional state and social identity are constructed. In early period of life, children absorb information not just through formal tutelage but, importantly by interacting with the people in their immediate surroundings. Among all such interactions, the family remains unparalleled in its importance, serving as a child's primary and enduring educational institution. It is within the family that the earliest experiences of love, discipline,

³ Convention on the Rights of the Child arts. 3, 18 & 29, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

communication, conflict, cooperation, empathy and ethical decision-making take place. It is these constant interactions that then give rise to behavioural patterns, emotional responses, and social norms, many of which are carried into adolescent and adult life.⁴

A significant mechanism through which children acquire these behaviours and values is observational learning, defined as the learning of behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses by observing the actions of other persons and the consequences⁵ that accompany these actions. Unlike learning exclusively from direct instruction, observational learning allows children to gain social insights from witnessing how parents, siblings, and other family members interact with each other and behave on a day-to-day basis. This can range from families where love, honesty, respect and a sense of moral responsibility is nurtured to homes where characterized by violence dishonesty and abuse. In either case children pick up the behaviours and incorporate them into their understanding of how the world works and what behaviours are expected of them. Thus families are not only nurturing the very grounds but also important channels of social learning.⁶

The significance of family-based observational learning is even more in contemporary societies undergoing rapid change. Rapid urbanisation, the increasing diversity of family structures, the participation of parents in employment outside the home, technological innovation, and the ubiquity of media are all transforming the contexts⁷ in which children are socialised. While educational institutions, peer groups, and media continue to play important roles, the family remains the primary socialising agent in the socialisation of core values, the development of emotional regulation, and the development of interpersonal skills and social competence in children. The nature of children's initial family experiences is directly correlated to their ability to form healthy attachments, managing conflicts, regulate emotions and assume their place as productive members of society.⁸

While observational learning has long been recognised by psychological studies as a fundamental aspect of child development, particularly within the context of Social Learning

⁴ Diana E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds & Ruth Duskin Feldman, *Human Development* 25–38 (12th ed. McGraw-Hill Educ. 2012).

⁵ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* 22–29 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977).

⁶ Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* 47–69 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1986).

⁷ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *the Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* 3–15 (Harvard Univ. Press 1979).

⁸ Diana E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds & Ruth Duskin Feldman, *Human Development* 216–243 (12th ed. McGraw-Hill Educ. 2012).

Theory,⁹ the majority of this research focuses primarily on the psychological nuances of observational learning in children and their behavioural outcomes, with less attention being paid to its wider socio-cultural, educational and legal implications. To date, insufficient research efforts have explored the holistic impact of day-to-day family behaviour on children's developmental as an intertwined phenomenon interacting with, and affected by, legislation and policy initiatives aimed at securing children's welfare and enforcing their rights.¹⁰ As the world increasingly Grapples with concerns about child and adolescent mental health, behavioural problems, family violence, the harmful impact of excessive screen time, and a decline in genuine interaction, a more integrated investigation of observational learning is both timely and urgently needed.¹¹ This paper examines in detail how behaviour of parents is absorbed by the child as they witness actions in daily life to affect child socialisation process. Social Learning Theory explores positive and negative parental behaviours and their impact on the child's emotional regulation, empathy, moral reasoning, resilience, self-esteem, communication, and socialisation ability.

UNDERSTANDING OF OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING

Observational learning is a key by which the individual becomes familiar with norms, behaviours, attitudes, values, and emotions by observing, listening, and being influenced by the actions and behaviours of others, including peers or by directly experiencing the consequences of certain behaviours. Unlike behaviours learned as a direct response to a punishment or reward, observational learning allows individuals the opportunity to learn a particular behaviour without directly implementing it; and because individuals do not need direct experience with a particular behaviour for learning to occur. Children's rapidly developing cognitive, emotional, and social facilities make them extremely receptive to observational learning of appropriate social behaviours via observing behaviours and their associated consequences.

The idea that individuals could learn through observing those around them, not through reinforcements or punishments was developed in theory of the Social Learning Theory.¹² Prior to this, the theory stated that individuals learn through direct conditioning. However, Bandura's work revealed that people could engage in particular actions as a consequence of watching them, without being reinforced or punished personally for engaging in the learned

⁹ Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory 1–15 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977).

¹⁰ Convention on the Rights of the Child arts. 3 & 18, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

¹¹ World Health Organization, World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All (2022).

¹² Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory 22–29 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977).

behaviour. Instead, it was found that learning involves observation of behavioral models and the determination of whether to initiate similar behaviour based on perceptions of the actions observed and consequences delivered to the model. As a result, human behaviour was no longer approached from a strictly stimulus-response theory but from an interaction-based theory incorporating cognitive processes.

One experiment demonstrating this theory was the Bobo Doll Experiment, the initial experiment to study how and why children acquire aggressive behaviours. The results of the Bobo Doll Experiment demonstrated that not only aggressive children acquire aggressive behaviour from watching an aggressive model, but observational learning was identified as a primary mode through which children acquire behaviours. Children who observed an aggressive model then engaging in similar aggressive behaviour in the future as they watched themselves engage in the behaviours were a testament to the influences people have on one another.

This experiment particularly highlighted the fact that models of any stature have significant impacts on their young audiences and the behaviours they adopt and that models of trust, authority, or emotional importance influence the learner more. Because parents have one of the strongest relationships with a child, the effects that these behaviours have on childhood development are particularly profound, especially in relation to aggressions.

According to Bandura, observational learning is achieved through four distinct, but interrelated cognitive processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The acquisition of behaviour through observational learning occurs through directing one's attention to behaviour. The ability to direct attention toward one's surroundings and toward people and actions within them is aided by one's relationship to a modelled individual: the more attachment, familiarity, perceived credibility, assigned to a model, the more attention a child will direct toward that model's actions. The behaviours one observes are then coded and stored in memory through retained representation in the child's mind allowing one to perform the behaviours later in his or her life.

Retention is the cognitive foundation on which reproduced actions are modelled. Reproduction involves the ability to reenact the learned behaviour, and both the learning and reproduction of behaviour's often depend upon an individual's motivation to do so. Motivation ultimately influences whether a behaviour modelled previously will be replicated, the model is likely to continue repeating the actions that are followed by reinforcement,

punishment or negative social consequences and is unlikely to repeat behaviour's that are punished or followed by no significant negative consequences. It reveals that observational learning is not simple copying but a process through which children actively learn which actions best suits them in relation to others.

Within a family setting, observational learning is ongoing and occurs unconsciously. Interactions give children countless occasions to observe emotional expressions, interpersonal communication, resolution of conflicts, expression of affection, completion of family responsibilities, and responses to success and failure. As a child interacts with family members, he or she will naturally begin to form his or her own attitudes about dealing with emotions, morals, and social interactions, which will continue to be with him or her throughout life. A family is a child's first source of learning not only about emotions and social experiences, but about enduring attitudes as well that influence relations and experiences with others in numerous relationships.¹³

While the family is the most proximal learning source the child interacts with on a daily basis, it is just one of a few people that children have come to rely on with respect to learning about behaviours; today, school, peer groups, television and video games¹⁴ make up a significant network in a child's life with which social learning is occurring. However, each of these influences is an isolated source of learning; what a child learns in family setting influences his or her perception of what is to be learned at school, from peer groups and media. If a child is brought up in a caring, respectful environment where problems are handled positively and when good behaviour is positively reinforced, that child will be more likely to process and learn appropriately in each additional environment he or she enters later in his or her life.

On the other hand, a child who is raised in a world where emotional conflict, neglected children, prejudice, and personal harm are normal and frequent, behaviour is more likely to be unsuccessful in future learning experiences and with respect to learning appropriate social and behavioral methods.

For this reason, learning with family makes a significant impact on their child and the behaviours he or she acquires. Observational learning is a far broader concept than what

¹³ Diana E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds & Ruth Duskin Feldman, *Human Development* 181–214 (12th ed. McGraw-Hill Educ. 2012).

¹⁴ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* 3–15 (Harvard Univ. Press 1979).

many psychologists see it as, psychological tool that allows people to perform particular behaviour and it seems is the core principle through which attitudes, values, emotions, social behaviours, interpersonal skills and abilities are acquired and formed. It also the foundation upon which one can begin to understand the impact family interaction has on the behavioural development of the child and that their first learning environment gives foundation for all other relationships they will encounter during their lifetimes.

THE CHILD’S FAMILY – THEIR FIRST LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Without question the most significant early environment for a child’s learning is the family itself. The family is both the most protracted in terms of enduring influence on the child and the first in the process by which the child starts to learn about the social world around them. Before they are ever involved in any Formal Education System they encounter and continually observe not simply interactions but also how they interact with others, emotional cues, ways of speaking, ways in which behavioural expectations are conveyed, and crucially how consequences of behaviour are met, lessons usually conveyed and practiced in the course of the day’s everyday tasks and conversations rather than structured tuition.¹⁵ Children develop a sense of self and “others” by observation and through the ways in which interactions unfold at the table when mealtime happens, if they’re encouraged at the point of success or failure, the way expressions of care or disappointment are conveyed, how family conflicts are negotiated and resolved or where there are demonstrations of responsibility.

The family has always been recognised as a critical unit for child development among the psychological and sociological community alike. Albert Bandura’s theory of Social learning¹⁶ posits that a large portion of behaviour comes from observation of others. This includes not just learning of behaviour and action but also modelling of skills, of values, and of ways of relating with other humans which are observed directly from role models the child has access to often ones whom they are most closely emotionally bonded. However, simply observation does not necessarily make a good learner, or does it mean that the family alone assembles behaviours that are conducive to a healthy, happy human.

¹⁵ Diana E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds & Ruth Duskin Feldman, Human Development 181–214 (12th ed. McGraw-Hill Educ. 2012).

¹⁶ Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory 22–39 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977).

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ¹⁷Ecological theory categorises the home environment as the primary system, wherein the closest interactions occur and where children can be directly and immediately influenced through interactions at school, with neighbours etc, the family at the centre of this environment. Similarly Lev Vygotsky's social development theory ¹⁸asserts that all development first occurs on the social level through a process of mediation between adults and between peer. Then it occurs on the psychological level. The family is clearly the immediate micro-environment in the child's life providing immediate and direct experience of others and their actions that directly build those basic building blocks of emotionality that come into place during childhood.

In practice of course behavioural learning within the family goes far beyond the intention to explicitly teach the child about anything specific; rather learning is picked up, modelled and mirrored. Most children are not given a lesson about honesty nor why fair is best; rather they learn the behaviour through observing such behaviour modelled on them. It is the implicit learning process through modelling where lessons come into their own for example if a child has honest, reasonable parents who express gratitude, show respect to their partners and others, if they model patience, forgiveness, mutual reliance, responsibility and empathy there is no question this is how learning takes hold, much as it can through example of cruelty, racism, verbal abuse. It shows the way we are in fact modelling behaviours with all the intent that this generates – in its positive or negative, productive or destructive capacity.

The impact of learning within the wider family group also carries the impact of learning of culture, ethical lessons, religious practices and even language in ways the immediate parents often cannot. Furthermore, siblings learn and modify their behaviours in response to interactions in companionship, and conflict throughout childhood influencing development and socialization on many levels. ¹⁹Consequently the child lives within a learning community which, however poorly, shapes behaviour.

Learning values occurs through our interactions with members of our family, and so our capacity for and appreciation of value, equity, justice, cooperation, respect and mutualism are learned and mirrored within the family structure. In this way our family unit gives us, among

¹⁷ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *the Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* 3–15 (Harvard Univ. Press 1979).

¹⁸ Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* 79–91 (Michael Cole et al. eds., Harvard Univ. Press 1978).

¹⁹ Judy Dunn, *Siblings and Socialization*, in *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research* 309–327 (Joan E. Grusec & Paul D. Hastings eds., Guilford Press 2007).

the myriads of others we encounter through life, our initial entry points into how we interact with others in our environment be it a classroom, workplace, and on into the wider community at large and our understanding how the wider social order functions. The family remains, even now with all the socio-changes that we are experiencing urbanization, decline of traditional nuclear family, population migration, rapid technology development, proliferation of on-line games, internet, and mobile devices.²⁰

Though school may contribute, friends or online platforms, most of children's behaviours with these later influences are filtered through those values and attitudes they formed within the family unit during the childhood years. How does this learning process shape a child's interactions, relationships and overall journey of social development? This will be the question asked for the purposes of this analysis.

FAMILY BEHAVIOURS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social development describes a child's transition from infancy to young adulthood where they're provided with the social, interpersonal and moral understanding of attitudes, values, belief-sets and skills that are necessary for building functional interpersonal bonds and contributing productively to social life. Educational institutions, peer-groups as well as neighbourhood encounters also play an instrumental role in social development, however, The family unit still provides society's earliest, most important and indeed foundational socialising grounds. Every minute observation of communication among the families members day in day out affords the child's opportunity to understand communication; cooperations; Empathy; respect; Justice; Responsibility; Conflict resolution and a raft of other valuable behavioural components necessary for smooth interpersonal connections that these components cannot just learn by any specific moral education program but by virtue of the families actual and consistent behaviour, The quality of family behaviour therefore impacts on how these children look at any relationships they will be forming throughout their life.

One of the earliest domains impacted positively by family behaviour is communication. Children are learning how to express thought, reciprocally to share understanding of any subject, find solutions to communication barriers and how to engage in conversation from observing how communication happens within the household. When families promote

²⁰ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *the Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* 16–42 (Harvard Univ. Press 1979).

respectful language usage, and respect individual contributions the child is confident to engage and share as well as tolerant when listening to the others share.²¹

Conversely when there are constant angry shouts or intimidations, children withdraw, shut down emotionally, cannot express them and cannot build trust relationships and respect because there are used to a normalising relationship where these elements are common. Communication by its language, tone and emotional setting shapes a children future communication competence.²²

Family behaviour directly impacts whether a child will develop as a co-operative human being and become sympathetic, Children can learn how to respond to the feeling of a member family the moment there are trained through the action of the families. Empathy; Cooperation; Generosity; Care when a person family is feeling down. Whether the children do favours for others family, taking responsibility of share duties for a family, showing their Appreciation; how they show concern for their families is really a model for them to imitate and in due course the child gets developed. If a child has lived in an environment full of discrimination; wickedness; Unresponsiveness or where other have been mocked to their maximum, it may result in callous child/children, where they won't consider feelings of others and as such may not develop a genuine relationship with others, hence their ability to communicate; tolerate others; Cooperate others is stunted ²³and this also applies to any social interaction like learning, future job and other.

Moral reasoning is also impacted greatly by family behaviour, for example most children can learn right/wrong through family behaviour rather than a formal moral lesson at school ,children observe and model how their parents are honest, handle issues, their sense of accountability, whether they mistreat others or have compassion. Parents that consistently make choices based on moral principles accept responsibility for their behaviour and fairness encourages moral thinking that are beneficial for life on the long run. If parents on the other hand always preach right/wrong behaviour but conduct themselves in a totally opposite way children may grow up a double standard moral system where they know right/wrong but do not adhere to it for example to use unfair mean, to discriminate, to abuse or cheat in school.

²¹ Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory 22–39 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977).

²² Diana E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds & Ruth Duskin Feldman, Human Development 181–214 (12th ed. McGraw-Hill Educ. 2012).

²³ Martin L. Hoffman, Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice 33–61 (Cambridge Univ. Press 2000).

Another factor influenced by family behaviour is the learning that occurs about inter-personal relationships and conflict. Conflict is inevitable in every family but the way that they are handled will affect the behavioral mannerism for that child through interaction. If a family engages in open communication to resolve Conflicts; compromising with mutual respect; Showing concern to each other's feeling after disagreement; forgiveness; learning to build and trust; learning to forgive, a child is most likely to do same through such interactions, especially children in a safe environment. If this is not the case, family often tend to instil behavioral norms like aggression; threat; Intimidation; manipulation etc which influences children to act similar way in their environment and society thus shaping their relationship at school, college, workplaces and with communities in terms of having or lacking equal status or control of each other.

This familial approach also forms child's perception of society, responsibility and their role as citizens. Participation in household duties; Respecting elders' opinion; Taking care of fellow citizen in community ; and obeying community rule forms the behavioral structure of interaction with the general public hence, by doing, these activities the child can recognize their own potential and power not just as member of the family but also of society itself through various responsibilities taken. The experience children's have at family level when respect for one other is upheld; tolerating different viewpoints, the sense of duty to community or responsibility for the general environment helps to mold child into a conscious, capable social citizen in future which is also important for any academic institution, workplace and nation building.²⁴

In today's complex social interaction where the influence of internet, social media, peer-groups, as well as cultural influences have gone very far it is essential for child to receive support and guidance as they encounter challenges of any of these interactions ,if the support children receive form their families is inconsistent, poor guidance, not well-modelled behaviours of family, they are at high risk of falling into depression, isolation, drugs...etc which affects their mental as well as general developmental outcome.²⁵ This discussion about influence of family behaviour on social development can as easily be applied in analysis of how they also affect emotional development which is next section the effect of families on child's emotional behaviour.

FAMILY BEHAVIOUR AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

²⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 29, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

²⁵ World Health Organization, World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All (2022).

Emotional Development: is a lifelong and multifaceted process whereby children develop the ability to identify, understand, express, and regulate emotions, as well as build psychological resources to foster healthy relationships and cope with life's challenges. Although biological maturity provides the foundation for emotional development, a child's quality of emotional growth is highly dependent ²⁶on the family environment during childhood. Even before they are able to communicate sophisticated emotions, children observe parents and other caregivers as they express affection, react to stress, negotiate conflicts, express disappointments, celebrate successes, and offer comfort in times of pain.

These ordinary interactions then become the foundation upon which the child begins to develop understandings about how to feel, express feelings, manage relationships, establish trust, and define self. Thus, emotional development is a learned experience in social relationships that continues throughout the span of life within the intimate context of the family.

Attachment and Interpersonal Functioning: The significance of the role of families in early emotional development can be effectively conceptualised by. The primary premise is that secure emotional bonds, which typically begin in infancy within early child-parent relationships, are critically important to the development of overall health and successful functioning across the life course. Provided a research basis for these theoretical proposals as it illustrated that different patterns of relating emerged among infants based on patterns of caregiving that affect how children interact with others in later life. Children who have experienced consistently loving and responsive parenting are far more likely than those with unreliable or absent care providers to develop secure attachment styles that have a pronounced impact on their social competence, mental stability and overall well-being. Such insecure attachment styles predispose children to difficulties in areas ranging from anxiety to low self-esteem, and a failure to achieve their full potential.

Emotional Regulation: Family interactions are critical as children learn to regulate their emotions. This learning occurs gradually through modelling or observation of their primary attachment figures; as children learn about emotional management, by watching how significant adults manage their own feelings as they experience the various vicissitudes of everyday life. Children that develop a sense of emotional security by being reassured in the presence of emotion or provided with strategies to use a constructive response are thus able to

²⁶ Diana E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds & Ruth Duskin Feldman, *Human Development* 181–214 (12th ed. McGraw-Hill Educ. 2012).

take the next step in learning, to actually manage their own emotions effectively. In contrast, parents that regularly expressed uncontrolled anger, were overly critical, or responded erratically to emotional distress model a range of unhealthy or dysfunctional emotional coping behaviours that will continue to haunt children long after they have left home and have taken on their roles as adult members of society.

Self-Esteem and Emotional Security: The process for children to build their self-worth hinges quite heavily on the modelling behaviour of parents or other significant care providers; as what children perceive about themselves is based largely on the messages and cues that they perceive from the important relationships in their life. Those families that model emotional availability, offer praise when warranted, provide helpful guidance, and exhibit acceptance create a foundation on which children can build genuine confidence. This allows them to explore and seek opportunities with a more outward posture and more willingness to fail; because what we understand is that most of failure has as its roots underdeveloped self-image or a fear of an undesirable negative parental response. In contrast to what is desired, where constant, excessive negative critical remarks and negative responses from caregivers can contribute to a diminished sense of self-worth.

It is important to note that not everyone exposed to negative family influence develops maladaptive outcomes nor do people receiving optimal support have immune systems from future emotional problems. Such factors as temperamental differences, social support systems outside the family engaging in constructive school and extracurricular activities, and positive interactions with positive adult mentors outside the home can all act as significant protective factors or mediators. Nevertheless, research has shown that those individuals with multiple such exposures are at a greater risk for depression, anxiety, emotional/behavioural disorders and impaired functioning.²⁷

Contemporary trends are making family dynamics all the more important, as increasingly, families must cope with issues associated with global migration, diverse cultural factors, demanding professional and parenting lives and the constant threat of technological encroachment in life. Technology has certainly increased opportunities to stay in touch, emotional availability cannot be replaced by the sharing of a virtual space or the immediacy of digital text messaging, and children need a sense of emotional availability that can never

²⁷ World Health Organization, World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All (2022).

substitute the time the child spends sharing time and emotional responses with his or her parents, siblings, other family members or other important adults in their lives.²⁸

Overall, family behaviour influences far more than a child's immediate emotional response in a specific situation; it actively lays the foundation for and contributes to the establishment of enduring psychological patterns of emotional regulation, attachment security, emotional and social resilience, as well as the overall wellbeing of the child throughout the remainder of his or her life. Understanding the manner in which behaviour and emotion are expressed within the context of family life helps us to understand why certain patterns and relationships are so influential on individuals as they mature through life course stages.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURAL MODELLING WITHIN FAMILIES

The modelling of within the family is by far the most powerful method by which children acquire attitudes, values, emotional reactions and social behaviour. Echoing the general tenets of modelling and observational learning, children do not just imitate isolated actions but instead, through witnessing it, learn rule patterns that is, the averaging of behavioural predispositions based on observing once, twice, dozens, or hundreds of times, and then determining their appropriateness and importance. Interaction within the family implies lessons for what is appropriate and inappropriate, meaningful and meaningless, and so on. This is what differentiates positive from negative paths of modelling as the two polar perspectives through which children develop.²⁹

Positive behavioural modelling may be seen in the actions of parents and other caregivers on a daily basis. These individuals may demonstrate being deeply caring and compassionate, acting with honesty and honour in their dealings with other people, being respectful and considerate of their thoughts and feelings, behaving responsibly and reliably, managing their emotions effectively, and communicating directly and assertively.³⁰ When parents and other caregivers admit to making mistakes, work to resolve differences in a non-violent way, treat others kindly and fairly, and respond to difficulties with patience, they are not just telling children how they want them to behave. They are showing them how to turn values into actions.

²⁸ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health* (2021).

²⁹ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* 22–39 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977).

³⁰ Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* 47–69 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1986).

The more often children see these types of behaviour reinforced through positive interactions at home, the more likely they are to develop self-esteem, emotional resilience and security, cooperative behaviours, moral accountability, and a wide range of social skills. They are also, therefore, more likely to learn to behave responsibly and make reasonable decisions, emotionally regulate effectively, and act with consideration and society.

The second aspect that impacts the adaptive behaviour of families is their response to setbacks, failure, frustration, and adversity. Children notice the extent to which families use adaptive strategies like problem solving, accepting responsibility, and maintaining an optimistic outlook instead of blaming, aggression, withdrawal and overprotection when faced with challenges. Families that model adaptive responses to adversity, structure their environment to allow children to practice adaptive skills, and provide love and stability through adversity develop resilient children. In this way, resilience is a developmental strength that derives from environmental influences, specifically those used in child rearing.

Conversely, negative behavioural modelling can have a detrimental effect on healthy child development. Constant exposure to violence, inter-family discord, deceit, prejudice, emotional neglect, addiction, harsh or violent parenting, and exclusionary attitudes may in time desensitise children to behaviours which may damage their ability to feel emotionally secure and adapt socially. Children tend to view parents and caretakers as reliable role models of appropriate behaviour and thus repeated exposure to inappropriate conduct as described above may establish such actions as normal and permissible in the mind of the child as well as affecting them emotionally, interpersonally, academically, statistically and psychologically over time. It should be noted that the effects of negative modelling result not from single isolated incidences but rather from a series of similar actions and behaviour patterns.

However, behavioural effects should not be assumed to be predetermined or unchangeable. Current studies of development emphasise children's capacity for resilience, which refers to their ability to 'overcome environmental adversity and later attain normal levels of functioning, behaviour, and development', via protective factors such as involvement of extended family members, teachers, mentors and friends, and resources and services in the community. School, mental health and other social services, and positive social relationships may all enable children to attribute past negative experiences differently, and thus develop more positive behaviours. Identifying these protective effects appears important, since it

emphasises the capacity for children to develop, without at the same time falsely implying that negative experiences in the family will inevitably have negative effects in future life.

The omnipresence of digital media and the internet, along with the dynamic nature of the digital environment, only makes effective online behavioural modelling more complex. Children today have a broad spectrum of models of behavioural influence available to them, which emanate from not only their familial surroundings but from many other sources including internet personalities, peers, entertainment media, or distant virtual communities. The overwhelming presence of competing models in the digital environment, however, would have little bearing on child's perception of and response to them unless she has a stable foundation of values, emotional competence, and rationality set in place by her family of origin. A child backed up by her parents and peers in healthy ways of dealing with the digital environment would appear to be protected from losing sense of proper behaviour, discarding true values and succumbing to dangerous temptations, while her counterparts from dysfunctional families might find online threats and influences more harmful.³¹

LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has important legal and policy implications because children's social, emotional and psychological development depends so strongly on the family background within which they process observations. While the law can't police every family situation, it has a vital function in safeguarding a child's rights, and creating an environment that nurtures their growth. This function has been acknowledged in the Constitution of India on several grounds including Articles 21, 21A, 39(e), 39(f) and 45.³²

Apart from constitutional law, the Child Protection Measures are supplemented by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989,³³ which it is a Party to. Article 3 of the UNCRC states that in any proceedings related to a child, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration, and in *Gaurav Nagpal v. Sumedha Nagpal*, (2009) 1 SCC 42, the Supreme Court stated that a child's welfare is the basic consideration for every issue involving a child. Under both the constitutional and statutory law, the protection of a child is sought not only in

³¹ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health* (2021).

³² INDIA CONST. arts. 21, 21A, 39E, 39(f) & 45.

³³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989, which India is a Party to.

cases of abuse but by providing conditions for a child to grow physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically.³⁴

As a general rule, the legal protections must be underpinned by preventive and family-centred policies. States and schools need to invest in strengthening parent education programmes, invest in making family advice and children mental health services more available, promote family-school cooperation and enhance public knowledge about the lifelong developmental influence of family behaviour. These types of policies serve children's best interests by tackling the source of developmental impairment and could also produce a future generation of emotionally secure, socially responsible, and resilient individuals.³⁵

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, observational learning is a crucial mechanism by which children learn the behaviours, attitudes, emotional reactions and social skills of the social environment they grow up in. As this essay has shown, the family home is crucial as the child's first and longest lasting learning environment where the minute details of everyday life can act as behavioural models crucial for emotional health, social functioning, moral development and relationships with others. Children learn by initiation and by 'reading' their family members' behaviour, in the here and now of daily life as they communicate, solve problems, use language and interact with one another. Thus, behavioural patterns learned in the family may extend far into the child's life and future, impacting their experiences of the world and how they relate to other people in future years.

Based on the research, the findings of this paper further support that observational learning is not inherently good or bad but the developmental outcomes from such are contingent upon the quality, frequency, and environment of the behavioural models to which children are exposed. Family environments of love, empathy, respect, warmth, security, integrity and responsible behaviour by family members develop resilience, emotional intelligence, social competence and moral reasoning. However, on-going exposure to aggression, neglect, hostility, discrimination or dysfunctional family or community interactions has possible negative effects on emotional stability, social behaviour and long-term psychological development of children. Although resilient offspring, positive educational settings, and

³⁴ Gaurav Nagpal v. Sumedha Nagpal, (2009) 1 S.C.C. 42 (India).

³⁵ U.N. Comm. on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, U.N. Doc. CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1 (Sept. 20, 2006).

community relationships promote well-being, they cannot replace a nurturing family setting during childhood.

However, the future of every society is shaped long before children first step into classrooms, offices and courtrooms. It is shaped in families where children learn about trust, empathy, respect, peaceful resolution of differences and integrity. The developmental importance of watching and learning, therefore, calls for a change in outlook-from considering family life as a mostly privatized aspect of life to viewing it as a core issue related to child rights, social justice and nation-building. When we attach priority to ensuring better family life, we prioritize the futures of generations to come.³⁶

³⁶ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* 22–39 (Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977).