

CONCLUSION

A Systems Approach and Developmental Perspective

Emotional and behavioural difficulties evident in adolescence generally have roots in early childhood. They are intricately entwined in a number of factors as seen above: family interactions including abuse and neglect, parental psychopathology and family stress, genetic predispositions, pre- and post-natal circumstances, and neurological development. There is evidence that complex and time-sensitive aspects of neurological development depend upon warm and responsive care giving during critical developmental phases. Emotional and neurological development is intimately connected with the attachment (or bonding) between mother and child in the first year or two of life. When this is absent or inadequate and their relationship is characterized by rejection, a series of difficulties kicks in, almost in domino-like fashion, giving rise to emotional difficulties and behavioural problems, learning difficulties, educational failure, stress in the home, school dropout, linking with antisocial peers, delinquency, early unwed parenting, unemployment, and continuing cycles of problems in the next generation, often marked by child abuse or neglect.

It is not difficult to see how a systems approach and a developmental perspective offers the best chance of describing this reality. Each manifestation of antisocial behaviour is the result of a host of ~~co-factors~~ existing in unique combinations of feedback for different individuals and families. Violence in the home, maternal depression, paternal involvement in crime, learning difficulties, attention deficit and impulsivity, low verbal IQ: these potential variables interact uniquely in each family to mediate outcomes differentially. The ~~cure~~ for antisocial behaviour is dependent, therefore, on addressing the whole problem, rather than piecemeal aspects of it. In a systems view of things, particular tensions and dislocations unfold from the *entire* system rather than from some A defective part; i.e. the child. Also, as has been seen with an etiological perspective on attachment and its outcomes, the closer we get to critical early developmental processes, the more we are able to prevent problems. At any point along the continuum, however, there are effective ways to intervene, through education and other processes related to causal elements.