

# CHILDREN OF ADDICTED FATHERS

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## Abstract :

**T**he research compares 5-12 year old children of addicted fathers with those of non - addicted fathers . This experiment was carried out on one hundred families of the addict , In comparison to another one hundred non-addicted families. These children have not been subjects for social scientists and health experts because of the following facts :

- They live with their parents .
- They are not criminals yet .
- They show no signs of improper behavior .

In this study which is conducted through the experimental and analytical method , the results indicate that functions of the two family groups are totally different (72.08%) from the socialization of children , father's supportive and economic roles and their social relationship point of view .

## Key Words :

*Sociability, Supportive role , relationship , economic role .*

## INTRODUCTION :

Children of addicted families, generally fall into three groups :

1. The father is an addict .
2. Both father and mother are addicts.
3. The mother is an addict .

After the introductory investigation it became known that the first group constituted the absolute majority; therefore, the following questions are raised :

- What are the effects of the father's addiction on the function of the family ?
- What is the effects of the father's addiction on the socialization of children?
- How the father's supportive and economic role is disturbed?
- How do these effects influence social relations of the family members ?
- What is the father's role , specifically as a destructive factor ?

In order to understand the subject better , first I spent two terms of university training courses in Gharchak Addiction Rehabilitation Center which is the main center for addicts in Tehran . I was accompanied by some social work students . Each Friday I closely observed the addict's family relations . Thus I made these hypotheses about children of addicts . compared to normal children :

1. the sociability of the children of the addicted father is disturbed .

2. The father's economic role and power are greatly undermined .

3. The father's supportive role is weakened .

4. Social relationship of family members are disturbed .

It is obvious that sociability of children helps to maintain the social system of a society and its function is to transfer thoughts , Values and deep social concepts . Therefore , sociability is the main factor to build up a healthy society since the sociable children of a solid family can act according to social norms and values and live healthy afterwards . (1)

For measuring and testing sociability correctly , based on theoretic facts of the subject and views of ten members of the academic staff of a university , some indicators have been considered from which these criteria were chosen :

#### **Sociability :**

1. Respecting parents .
2. Obedience to orders of parents .
3. Voluntary help at home .
4. Agreement with their coevals.
5. Relationship with school officials.
6. Appearance .
7. educational status .
8. Children's reaction towards the father's presence and absence .
9. The way children socialize . (2)

For measuring and testing the economic and supportive role and social relation of family members the following criteria have been considered: (3)

1. Job status .

2. Way of going to work .

3. Income status .

4. Income .

5. Selling off home possessions.

6. Forcing wife to work .

#### **Criteria for the Supportive Role:(4)**

1. children's reliance on father for help .

2. Wife's reliance on husband for help .

3. Children getting along with father .

4. Wife getting along with husband.

#### **Criteria for Social Relation of Family Members (5)**

1. Children embarrassed by father's presence in social interaction .

2. Wife embarrassed by husband's presence in social interaction .

3. Children proud of father's presence in social interaction.

4. Wife proud of husband's presence in social interaction.

5. State of father's presence at home.

6. Disagreement between family members .

7. Longing for father when he is absent from home .

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS :**

To provide answers to the questions of the research , an outline for the two family groups of addicted father and non-addicted father was prepared. One hundred families with 5-12 years old children were selected as follows :

### Main Group :

Including one hundred families with addicted fathers :

- . The addict stays at the Gharchak Center .
- . Father has become an addict after the revolution . (1979 )
- . Father has been an addict for more than five years.
- . Father has been living with family until the time of interview .

### Control Group :

Including one hundred families with non - addicted fathers :

- . The same age as the addicts .
- . The same education as the addicts .
- . Similar job and income as the addicts .
- . Needless to say , the most difficult part of the research was selecting and getting in touch with the control group . Because after the questions had been coded and the questionnaires had been worked out for the main group , the four variables of age , education , job and residence of the addicts were chosen and now people with the same age , education and job had to be selected in the same places . So the members of the two groups would be the same except in the matter of addiction . The main group , whose members are distributed in seven different areas of Tehran , is shown in table 1 .

### 1- State of Residence of the Main Group ( Addicts )

Age	Education	Job	Residence area
15-19	Illiterate	Employee	Park-e-Shahr and Hasan Abad
20-24	Able to Read and Write	Worker	Nezam Abad
25-29	Primary Education	Driver	Gomrok and Molavi
30-34	Guidance School	Teacher	Shoosh
35-39	High School	Tradesman	Azadi
40-44	High School Graduate	High- Paid Jobs	Tajrish
45-49	Associate's Degree	Professional Jobs	Tehran pars
50 and over 50	Bachelor's Degree and Higher	Salesman	

In order to find the control group . different approaches such as getting help from mosques and real estate agencies in the seven areas were made which were not

very satisfactory . Finally social workers helped us to find members for the control group .

## 2- Comparing answerers of the Two Groups According to Age - groups

Age Group	Population		Total
	Main Group	Control Group	
25-29	2	3	5
30-34	33	35	68
35-39	50	47	97
40-44	15	15	30
Total	100	100	200

## 3- Comparing the Two Groups According to Education

Education	Population		Total
	Main Group	Control Group	
Illiterate	20	20	40
Able to Read and write	5	5	10
Primary Education	12	12	24
Guidance School	13	13	26
High School	20	20	40
High School Graduate	26	25	51
Associate's Degree	2	3	5
Bachelor's Degree and Higher	2	2	4
Total	100	100	200

#### 4- Comparing Distribution of the Two Groups According to Residence

Residence	Population		Total
	Main Group	Control Group	
Park-e-shahr and Hasan Abad	10	10	20
Nezam Abad	29	30	59
Gomrok and Molavi	31	30	61
Shoosh	14	14	28
Azadi	6	6	12
Tajrish	5	5	10
Tehran Pars	5	5	10
Total	100	100	200

#### Method of Data Collection :

A long time before collecting data , I gained some information by questioning one hundred students of primary and secondary schools in Tehran . There were a limited number of questions concerning the father's role and responsibility . I also questioned one hundred wives in Tehran about their expectations from a "husband" . I spent my Thursdays and Fridays ( weekend ) with addicts for eight months at the Gharchak Center . After building a close and professional relationship with them I observed them closely during visit sessions with their wives and children on Fridays , Moreover , I participated in group -assisting sessions . Addicts were also present, but despite a suitable relationship , their answers were either wrong or at the best , neutral . In other words , I reached the same conclusion I had years before , that " addicts " do not give suitable answers . Therefore , it was decided that questionnaires would be answered by the researcher based on interviews with the wives of the addicts .

#### Method of Analyzing Data for Verifying the Hypotheses :

In order to analyze the data to investigate the function and to make a comparison between the two family groups , the following steps were followed:

1. Firstly , different functions of the two groups for each of the variables , that is sociability , father's supportive and economic role and the social relation of family members, were separately clarified . Also the parameter of difference was absolute number of the subtraction by two.
2. The parameter of difference between the main group and the control group were compared in terms of the variables : so different functions of the two groups were indicated for each variable .
3. At the last stage in order to investigate difference between two family groups , the average of different parameters for each variable were compared .

## Limitations of Methodology

Since addicts are considered to be criminals in our society answers were in accordance with social beliefs , and it took a long time for me to decide to interview their wives instead . The most difficult part which had many limitations was finding the control group .

## Level of Probability

As we see , the distribution of respect for father in the main group differs 87 percent from the control group . Looking at the column of percentage of difference proves an important point . It shows that " very much " and " much " respect for father among addict's children is 86 percent less than those of nonaddicts . On the other hand , " little " or "very little " respect for father in the same group reaches 87 percent which ,on the whole , indicates a meaning-

### *5 - Distribution of Respect for Father among Children of the Two Groups*

Respect for Father	Percentage of Distribution		Percentage of Difference
	Main Group	Control Group	
Very much	0	33	-33
Much	2	55	-53
Not much	11	12	-1
Little	32	0	32
Very little	55	0	55
Total	100	100	87

## RESULTS :

To compare the children's sociability , father's supportive and economic role and social relationship of the two different groups , first the parameters of the afore - mentioned variables were compared with each other . Here , for example , only one of the parameters for sociability , that is , respect for father is mentioned . the difference in other parameters will appear in another table .

ful difference .

As we know , the respect of children for their parents is not only to satisfy them but also establishes the basis for children's social relations . Respecting parents paves the way for children's later respect for people and social laws . In the table below the percentage of difference for each of the sociability parameters is distinctly demonstrated .

## 6 - Variable Parameters of Different Definitions of Sociability in Main Group and Control Group :

Definitions of Sociability	Percentage of difference
Obeying father's Orders	92
Obeying Mother's Orders	30
Evading the Attention of School Officials	67
Obeying school Officials	44
Children's Association with their Unruly Coevals	47
Quarreling with and Hostility towards their coevals	55
Children's Reaction to the Presence of their Father	74
Comparing children's Appearance	42
School Achievement	28
Level of Respect for Father	87
Level of Respect for Mother	38
Respect for School Officials	51
Helping with house chores	25
Children's reaction towards father's absence	67
School Official's Interest in the Children	46
Quarreling with their Coevals	59
Friendly Relation with their Coevals	30
Poor School Achievement	43

**Average of variable parameters for sociability - 51 . 28 percent**

Considering the difference on the part of definitions of children's sociability among the two groups , shows the sociability of the children of the addicted father .

Concerning the father's economic role, first each of the parameters were considered and compared between the two groups and then their difference was determined.

**7- Variable Parameters for Father's Economic Role in Main Group and Control Group**

Criteria for the Economic role	Percentage of difference
Employment	97
The Way of Going to Work	81
Income Status	50
Income	80
Selling off Property	28
Forcing Wife to Work	40
Forcing Children to Work	45
Reason for Children's Poor Appearance	42

**Average of Variable Parameters for Father's Economic Role - 58 . 75 Percent**

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For children , " father " is a symbol of effort,activity , bread - earning and satisfying family needs . He gains more power through his functions (6) . These functions do not only refer to the father's ability to satisfy his families needs : they include the father's familiarizing his

children with the positive role of the concept of "working" . They internalize this role and gain a social status in future. Thus we understand the extent of difference between the children of the two family groups .

**8- Variable parameters for Father's Supportive role in Main Group and Control Group**

Criteria for the Supportive Role	Percentage of Difference
Being at Ease with Husband	96
Dependent on Husband	92
Being at Ease with Father	89
Dependent of Father	93

**Average of Variable Parameters for Father's supportive role 92.5 Percent**



In our society , father's supportive role is not merely that of providing for the family's expenses . His supportive role is a comprehensive one for the family.

Father's spiritual support for children does not stop even after children's marriage . When such a father becomes addicted his support for his children will generally fade away until it ceases to exist. At this

stage he will need to be supported himself while his children are still in need of his support . The image of a father is that of a provider and supporter for the family but when this image is shattered , children will lean on others outside the family for support and guidance which will lead to the vulnerability of the family .

### **9-Variable parameters for Social Relationship of Family Members in Main Group and Control Group**

Criteria for Social Relationship	Percentage of Difference
Children’s Feeling of Shame	100
Children’s Feeling of Ease	94
Children’s Feeling of Pride	99
Children’s Missing their Fathers	83
Wife’s Feeling of shame	99
Wife’s Feeling of Pride	96
Wife’s Feeling Ease	94
Wife’s Missing her Husband	89
Husband’s Presence at Home During the Past Year	79
The Wife’s Troubled Relationship with Husband	33

### **Average of Variable Parameters for Social Relationship of Family Members - 86.6 Percent**

Theoretical studies show that most family functions can be carried out by other social institutions except for the function of affection and the specific relationship between family members (7-8) . Particularly , parent-child relation and relations within the family structure are greatly influenced by the father's action . When a father becomes addicted he will change in many ways : he will do things secretly , he will become absent from home frequently , and a falsehood and suspicious atmosphere will overshadow social relations of the family . Therefore , these homes will become a scene for fighting , and family members will turn hostile towards each other . Since the father is unable to play his role in the family the result will be an unstable home whose members look for others to replace their father . Social relations between family members and the outside world will be disturbed too . There will be little social interaction in the presence of the father because family members will not be at ease then .

Now let us have a look at the average of the parameters and the difference between the main group and the control group in terms of major functions of the family :

- Difference of Average for Sociability .  
51.28%
- Difference of Average for Father's economic role .  
58.75%
- Difference of Average for Father's Supportive role .  
92.5%
- Difference of Average for Social relationship of family members .  
86.6%
- Difference of Average for Family function in the two groups .  
72.08%

The results indicate that functions of the two family groups are completely and extremely different (72.08 percent ) . It shows that the father's addiction , as an external factor , has disturbed family functions , deranged the roles of family members , and greatly affected the children .

The question here is " how has the father acted as a destructive factor among other factors ? In other words , how has he become a destructive factor ? Has he manipulated any factors or encouraged some sort of behavior ? " It seems that father's addiction has had its greatest destructive effect on his supportive role ( 92.5 percent ) and this has caused social relations of family members to be disordered (86.6 percent ) . The loss of family supportive role not only prevents children from acquiring social identity , it also disturbs the economic role which is another family function(57.78 percent). In fact, these percentages all emphasize the father's supportive function. His supportive role is more significant than his role as a provider for his family . His major role is to provide social means for his family and to help family members acquire social identities. But it is worthwhile to know why the level of difference for sociability is less than other variables . The existing social mechanisms such as the Ministry of Education and mass media , particularly television , have to some extent helped children in socializing regardless of their family problems . But , on the other hand, society has not been able to form the essential supportive mechanisms for those without family support .Therefore, those children who are deprived of their parent's support will not be able to replace it . In other words , without family support , a person cannot reach social status and respect to support his relation with others . In the absence of such

supportive mechanisms ( independent of family ) , the father's addiction can change such a family into a harmful family . This harmfulness is caused by disturbed supportive functions , which are irreplaceable . This study shows that many children of addicts expected support from their fathers and since they were not satisfied , they sought this support from their coevals and particularly older children . It was here that some of them were misled .

## DISCUSSION :

In the one hundred observed families , children witnessed quarrels between parents everyday and were totally confused in relation to receiving affection , control , supervision and support from their father . This is because when using drugs , their father became very happy and extremely kind. but when he ran out of drugs and became drowsy , he became so impatient and angry that he ignored his children's essential needs .

The children who are affected by such a vulnerable family try and eventually find a relationship between their father's taking drugs on one hand and his showing affection on the other . So they gradually begin to feel an interest and tendency towards love and good human qualities . Moreover they are always worried about the consequences of their father's being arrested . Father's irregular comings and goings and his suspicious social intercourse intensify the situation . He is no more able to support his family , but he himself needs support . Instead of managing , controlling and supervising his family , he will be a subject to manage . (9)

In many cases the father gives up his role of bread - earning instead of bringing

things home he begins to take things from it in order to sell them and buy his drugs . Thus , instead of being a bread - winner the father becomes a model of misbehavior. Children's disgust for drugs vanishes and since drugs are at hand at home and children are quite familiar with the matter , they develop an optimistic attitude towards the practice . Therefore , these children are more at risk , compared to their coevals , to become drug addicts later (10-11) . So we should insist more and more on UNICEF'S motto that "Children must be protected against the consequences of their elder's mistakes . " Also , we should find a way to protect children so they will not be hurt or influenced by their family or society's unhealthy conditions or improper behavior. At home , some parents smoke, others use unprescribed medicine ; they try to justify their action by using some cliches : " my nerves are shot ! I had better take a pill . " I can't sleep . I have to take some medicine . " Such " unhealthy behavior teaches children to take refuge in " some substance " when confronting difficulties . But what shall we do to maintain children's social health when they face addiction pathological conditions in society ? What is the answer to this question when the family is safe but drugs are available in the society ? Should we wait for the eradication of drugs in the society ? Is it enough to stop supply or should there be a reduction in demand too ?

When in epidemic disease is spread we have to be vaccinated against it to remain healthy. Likewise, in a vulnerable and susceptible society where people are inclined to use drugs , children must be vaccinated against drugs . In that case they can survive in an unhealthy and affected society . " Social vaccination " of children should begin at home and then schools . This

social vaccination may include many of the following individual and social skills :

- . Making appropriate decisions at the appropriate time - Decision Making .
- . Preventing children's bashfulness .
- . Developing their self - confidence .
- . Developing bold characters to contradict improper suggestions from their coevals - Refusal Skills .
- . Problem Solving Skills .

As a result , we expect a self-confident adolescent who is not bashful , to contradict improper suggestions such as offers by his/her friends to smoke or take drugs . Then children will be safe when vaccinated against pathological societies .

### **First Suggestion : to the Iran Welfare Organization**

If the father has been addicted for many years and is not able to give it up , is it right to take the children to special centers ? Of course not . We have to think of another way , that is , to take the father to a rehabilitation center and to support the mother and help her " socialize " her children in a more suitable atmosphere . Fathers in rehabilitation centers may learn suitable professions and skills and at the right time be tested for going back to their families if necessary .

### **Second Suggestion : to Special Civil Courts**

Wives of the addicts usually try to maintain the family system . They also do their best to treat their husbands or send them to rehabilitation centers . Most of the time the

wife's relatives also help treating the addicted husband .

Sometimes the wife is forced to sell her last piece of property , that is her wedding ring to survive . Her last refuge is the Special Civil Court to legalize her separated life . In such painful situations, both wives and children are hurt . Children are hurt mostly before the divorce . The researcher suggests that civil courts take into consideration the rights of these women and pave the way for this kind of divorce . With the support of the law the wife will be able to bring up and socialize her children without the father's physical and destructive presence .

### **Third Suggestion:to Research Centers**

The troubled family and its children have been the focus of family research for many years . It has been continuously stressed by researchers that there is a direct relationship between crime and the incompatibility of the young people on one hand and the troubled family on the other hand . This relationship is partly the result of higher death and divorce rates in poor neighborhoods where crime also has a high rate . Therefore , confirming such a direct relationship may not be right and the results of such researches need to be looked into more closely . During the few years which have been spent on observing and collecting data from families of addicted fathers it has become clear that many of these families which have apparently remained untouched , compared with single - parent families , may have a more destructive effect on children . In such families , the man and wife who feel they are forced to continue the marriage argue all the time . Instead of " living " together , husband and

wife are merely " alive " beside each other . They can hardly bear each other and their children instead of receiving affection , control , supervision and appropriate support live in a state of confusion which results in harm to them .

Therefore , as a suggestion , researchers who are interested in family matters had better carry out research on the subject of " family satisfaction " instead of investigating divorce . Addiction researchers interested in addiction are also asked to pay attention to the prevention of addiction instead of studying the addicted person individually and apart from the social structure and family relations . On the other hand , if changes cannot be removed from social phenomena , how have the directions changed in the Iranian family structure ? What have been the changes in its functions during these last years ? Which functions have been strengthened and which ones weakened ? Regarding content strengthening , what have been the directions of change in functions ?

## CASE REPORT

Majid is a 12-year - old boy . He is a sixth grade at secondary school . Here is an account of his situation in his own words :

" I found out about my father's addiction two or three years ago. I first heard it from the children in the neighborhood . We were playing football one day and we had an argument . I was hit by an older kid. When I said that I would tell my father about it , he said , " your father is a lifeless addict . " I was crushed because I always thought I could count on my father's support if I had any trouble outside home . After that I lost interest in my studies and as a result became known as a lazy student . The prin-

icipal asked for my father . When my father came to school he was high . I was completely embarrassed and sweating all over because of his talkativeness and the nonsense he said . After that I tried to hide myself from my teachers . Now I understood why at times my father was kind to me and praised me without reason or why at other times he became angry and rough . Once two of my classmates came to our house to see me and unfortunately the same thing happened . I was really ashamed then while other kids feel glad to see their fathers at home . I don't like seeing him at all . Nor do I miss him when he comes home late . When children talk about their fathers I become extremely upset . One day something very bad happened . When mother had gone out , my father took two of her gold bracelets from her purse and left the house immediately . I did not tell her when she came back home . I was really confused . Next day she was looking for it everywhere . I could not bear it. When she asked me about it I didn't answer. My mother was suspicious of my friends who had visited me the day before . I burst into tears and cried until I felt faint . Finally , I told her the truth . Until then she did not know what I had gone through because of my father's addiction , when I told her what our neighbor's son had said to me and what a scene my father had made at school , she burst into tears too . She cried for a long time and finally said : " I did not want you to know about his addiction . I always hoped he would quit. To tell you the truth , I found out about it one year after our marriage . I tolerated him because I was pregnant although I wish I had not . When I was on delivery , he went away to buy drugs , he was not there when I needed him . We argued about the way he went to work . He would sleep until ten in the morning and as

a result he was kicked out . One day he was dozing off when we were entertaining some relatives for dinner . I never felt proud of him ; on the contrary , I was ashamed and embarrassed . Worst than all , I was afraid you would become addicted too . Now that you know all about him , let us decide if we will go on living with him or not . "

Majid added , " if my father was dead , we would know where we stood . Then my mother could be both my mother and my father . However , he is alive now and she is still playing both roles . I think I should be able to distinguish between the two roles . Don't you think so ?

Majid had a lot to tell about his sufferings but there was no more time .

### **Acknowledgements**

**I would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Dr. H. Kakooie and Dr. M. Rahgozar.**

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