

“THE SAME STRUGGLE”



By: Dania Shoaib Khan

My thoughts about special children and the urge inside me to raise my voice for them is very much connected to my life experiences. I often remember myself sitting alone in the 8th Grade classroom, struggling to make relationships with friends, being bullied by the peers and let down by the teachers. I can still hear the words of my extended family members pointing me as “Abnormal”, my peers calling me “duffer” and my teachers humiliating me by giving physical punishments. It shattered my confidence into millions of pieces when I was asked by my teacher to stand outside the class and perform sit-ups for not doing my homework. Yes, I was different; I was not a sharp student like my peers and neither active as my sisters were, but, I don’t regret it because I believe that I am able to understand special education due to my childhood. I can understand how it feels to have a disability.

My developmental milestones were delayed and I had minor problems with motor coordination. I was not disabled in medical terms but the attitudes of people made me believe that I am abnormal and gave me “childhood depression” which hindered all of my capabilities. I was second born among two sisters who were very active and social. My mother was alone raising three daughters as my father was settled abroad for financially supporting our family. My mother sent me to a so-called “English Medium School” which was nearby my house because she couldn’t send me anywhere far away from my home due the insecurities she herself was going through. From the very beginning, my parents were so anxious about me and my problems. They tried their level best to support me and resolve my issues and it is indeed the struggle of my parents that has made me stand as a Ph.D. scholar today. However, the story of my childhood and things about my horrifying school life could be different and prevented if my parents were given a proper guidance and counseling. I remember my elder sister use to win in almost every childhood game we, ever played together. It was not due to the lack of my abilities rather she was sharp enough to cheat on the games which I realized later. My elder and younger sister had a strong bonding between them and I was often neglected. This all was torturing me psychologically and ended up in childhood depression. There was a point in my life

when I lost all hopes and admitted that I am useless. In Grade 9th my parents took me to a psychologist and I went through cognitive behavior therapy. She was my actual teacher who pulled me out of that depression; she expanded the horizon of my thoughts and taught me how to cope up with my problems. She kept listening and listening to me until I kept talking. Even she went out of her way to help me out. I use to call her in her job timings, family timings regardless of thinking whether she is available or not, but, not even a single time she refused to listen. My life was changed when I entered into a college and I was a different person. My therapeutic sessions were over but I was still connected with my psychologist through phone calls. I had confidence that there is someone with whom I can share everything and I will not be labeled or judged. I preferred psychology and special education as my major at university level due to the inspirations from my psychologist. I always wanted to be like her. After my honors degree, she moved to Boston for her Ph.D. and I began to follow her footsteps in my education and career. I become an entirely different person and it was a complete shift from negative thoughts towards positive.

I am a different person now but I want to relive my childhood again in a better way. Obviously, nobody can change the past, but, helping the special needs children give me the feeling that I am reliving my childhood again. In every session with my students, I find myself connected with my childhood. I want to make lives of special children better and protect them from whatever has happened to me, but, unfortunately, things are the same as they were in my case. There is a strong need to work more on the perceptions and attitudes of the society towards special children than the therapeutic services, as prevention is always better than the cure.

Problems can be only prevented through the awareness about the problems and their causes, as in my case, my parents were struggling to resolve the apparent issues however, they might have changed my school or counseled my siblings about my problems if they were aware of the root causes. As a researcher, I will try to create awareness in families particularly mothers with whom I will have a direct connection. I will make them develop insight about their scenarios within the boundaries of

qualitative research methods. Based on those experiences, I want my readers to think about psychological aspects of development rather than focusing on the treatment programs. These thoughts link me towards interpretive and critical theory paradigms because I want to reveal the lived experiences of special needs children with their siblings through their mother's perspective and represent them to bring a social change. I want parents to be the counselors of their children before the problems become huge and uncontrollable.

