Report of Webinar on ‘Parenting/Caregiving in a Pandemic’ held on 10th June 2020, organized jointly by Departments of Sociology and Psychology

Living with the pandemic and continuously struggling with it as well as its associated experiences like lockdown, unlocking and the ‘new normal’ threshold inspired the departments of Sociology and Psychology of Hiralal Mazumdar Memorial College for women to provide academicians, scholars and students an academic discourse and platform to share their respective insights as well as offer some realistic measures to help parents and caregivers in assisting children in the present crisis situation. The webinar was organized in collaboration with ‘Bandhu Foundation’, a charitable organization.

Speakers of the webinar were Prof. (Dr.) Bula Bhadra, Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, Sister Nivedita University and Founder and Managing Trustee of Bandhu Foundation, Prof. (Dr.) Piyali Sur, Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University, Dr. Sanchita Ghosh, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, West Begal State University and Ms. Anusuya Moitra, Faculty, Department of Sociology, Muralidhar Girls’ College. The program was scheduled to take place from 6.30 pm-8.00 pm through Google Meet. Around 150 respondents expressed their willingness to participate in the webinar, however due to limited intake capacity the organizers could accommodate only 100 participants of which around 83 participants finally turned up. The webinar started with the Welcome Address by the honourable Principal of our college Dr. Soma Ghosh, followed by introduction of the speakers by the Convener of the Seminar Sub-Committee Shri Pradipta Mukherjee. The inaugural session was hosted by Dr. Rajasree Chakraborty, Faculty & Head, Department of Psychology, H.M.M College for Women.

The main points or issues that came out from the different deliberations of the webinar aimed to focus on ‘parenting as a partnership’, where parents and children are equal partners. It was proposed that since the pandemic and its associated factors have created a global crisis, the onus now lies on parents to make their children understand such situations, react sensibly and build a mutual, friendly relationship with their children in order to overcome all possible threats and risks coming to their way. Speakers have pointed out how spending more time with children can actually enable parents, caregivers and children themselves to be responsible and sensitive human beings. It has also being suggested that during the pandemic digital platforms have captured almost all possible spheres of our lives. Children are also no exception. Starting from their studies, hobbies and leisure everything is digitized nowadays. Some surveys have added, though children are usually more inclined to have such exposure in their everyday lives otherwise, but in this pandemic they often miss their schools, teachers, and friends terribly. Therefore their demands especially from their parents have definitely increased, which can best be handled by parents themselves. If parents allow children to use online platforms for leisure for sometime under their guidance and talk to them frequently, children will not develop isolation, which can later on be culminated into depression. Psychological well being of children and parents has also been discussed in this webinar. As challenges of maintaining ‘social distance’ or ‘isolation’ increases, depression and anger also increases both in parents and among children. Under the circumstance, how parents can teach their children to behave empathetically with other members of the family, how through various simple steps (e.g. deep breathing, avoiding altercations, listening patiently to children etc.) they can relieve themselves from anger and stress has also been talked about with real life instances and it was suggested that ‘Parenting is cultivating compassion- playfulness is essential in parenting’. Finally, the session ended with the last lecture focusing on how children with special needs or differently abled children are facing severe problems in the pandemic. It was proposed that parents of differently abled children also face hardships in such crisis situations, however if they increase their involvement with their children by telling them stories, childhood memories, encourage them to paint or do something that they like and also engage them in some routine household chores they can enable their children to think in a better way. Last of all it was suggested that compassionate understanding as well as love, care and support are actually required to build a strong parent/caregiver-children relationship, especially when the world is facing a pandemic, which did not occur in the last 100 years.

After this session the interactive session began and continued for almost an hour, where participants expressed their gratitude to the college for organizing a thematically relevant webinar and also raised several thought provoking questions, which enabled the speakers, organizers and participants develop a fruitful academic dialogue. The interaction session was anchored by Dr. Chandrabali Dutta and Dr. Rajasree Chakraborty and the final note was given by Dr. Arpita Mukherjee. Principal Madam and Shri Sayantan Ghosh delivered the vote of thanks and the program ended around 9 pm.

