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## **MOTHERHOOD AND SWITCH IN HER LEADERSHIP STYLES IN PARENTING DURING PANDEMIC – WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS...**

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### **Abstract**

A leader is a person, who influences his followers. The role of leader is often associated with managerial concepts, where a leader leads a team of employees, guides them, motivates them and influences them, in such way that the organisational productivity is honed up. A lot emphasis is on the style of leadership, exhibited by the manager, in honing the productivity of the organisation. According to (Hanvey, 2002; Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron, & Hughes, 2007; Morinaka, 2012; Reio & Fornes, 2011), most parents have dreams and hopes about their children and their lives. But, parents of children with special needs, though have, such dreams and hopes, have a harder time meeting these goals. According to Hanvey (2002), these parents need to devote more time and responsibilities, when it comes to raising a child with special needs, like caring for the child's physical requirements due to his/ her disability, helping them with their physical and social needs and also help them in developing relationships with the others, so that they get a feeling of belongingness. Families with children having special needs undergo a higher level of stress (Gottfried & McGene, 2013).

Families that have children with special needs, go through enormous stress levels, at times even financially stressed are they ... (Hanvey, 2002; Moriwaka, 2012).

But, Current study focusses on the effective leadership role played by a mother during the Pandemic, which is helping the kids, especially the children with special needs in combating the stress, that they are undergoing. A case of a child, diagnosed with autism(a serious behavioural disorder among young children that now occurs at epidemic rates in developing countries like India), since she turned two and how her mother has been helping her adapt to the new normal of staying home for all her activities and coping up with the increased stress levels.

**Keywords:** *leader, autism, new-normal*

### **Introduction**

People follow a leader who has authority over them. A leader should be acceptable by people for which he/ she has to authentic. The leader's intellectual capacity helps to conceptualize solutions and to acquire knowledge to do the job. A leader's abstract capabilities apply liveliness, judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact, and domain knowledge. Domain knowledge encompasses tactical and technical knowledge as well as cultural and geopolitical awareness.

A leader is expected to possess the following qualities :

- Great Communication skills.
- Vision.
- Empathy.
- Accountability.
- Gratitude.
- Compassion. ...
- Confidence in Themselves and Their followers ...
- Capability to Make Decisions, however, difficult they may be ...
- They want to serve a greater purpose. ...
- Create a friendly and amicable environment. ...
- They act as a role model to the others...

Pandemic, and the lockdown imposed by the government on schools has posed a challenge for all, especially for children, who are forced to confine themselves indoors throughout the day for months together. It is always believed that children learn from peers, when they go out and play, thus, also relax themselves mentally. With the children, trying to cope up with the stress of online learning and minimum outdoor activities, mothers have a greater role to play here, with their enhanced leadership roles. This is even more, so, in the case of children with special needs. Mauro (2020), says, if a child is categorised under a child with special needs, it means that he is unable to do a certain activities by himself, has a lot of food and other restrictions.

Children, in most cases, have accepted their mothers as their leaders and follow them.

Current study throws light on the different leadership styles adapted by mothers of children with special needs in helping them combat the stress of staying at home and adapting to the new-normal, during pandemic.

Kate Sullivan (2015) Mothers are very loyal and responsible, whether it is work or family. They are considered to be often faced with inter role conflicts – when at work, stressed about their kids and when at home, stressed about professional responsibilities at work. Constantly, are faced with role spill over- when tensions from work spill in to home life and vice versa. This causes a lot of mothers to quit their jobs and handle only their kids., while some of them efficiently manage this. But, if these mothers have a child with special needs, they have always preferred to devote their care and responsibility towards their children only with utmost care and concern. Their levels and stress, though may be at higher levels, they are playing multiple roles, in the current stressful situations- while managing their stress level and also striving hard to manage the stress levels of the children who are getting used to the stay home situation. According to Dalton et al., (2020), one of the biggest responsibilities, mothers are faced with is to explain to their children as openly as possible, communicating any sensitive information has a long-term effect on psychological wellbeing for a child. But, Mothers who have children with special needs are unable discharge this responsibility efficiently.

The current study focusses on the changes in leadership style, adapted by mothers of children with special needs.

### **Review of Literature**

Nanjundeswaraswamy T. S. and Swamy D. R.(2014) have identified an effective leader as one who is able to encourage followers to reach expected goals. Further they mention that Transformational leadership style focuses not just on their needs, but also the overall development of the follower. The goal here is to ‘transform’ followers and in turn the overall personality and confidence level of the follower will reap the benefits of this positive transformation.. According to them Transactional Leadership relies on rewards and punishments to ensure better behaviour from the child.

Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) developed a new model of leadership with two main aspects (i) Competence areas and (ii) Personal Characteristics. Elements they focused on in competence areas included (a) ability to envision a clear future (b) appropriate way to engage each person (c) enabling each individual with a strong belief in their capabilities (d) freedom of inquiry about all aspects (e) enhance each individual to ensure that the desired contribution takes place. Characteristics highlighted in the model encompassed (i) being authentic (ii) integrity of the individual (iii) motivation to reach the desired goal (iv) belief in one’s abilities (v) awareness of oneself.

Sarah Burke and Karen Collins reported that women prefer an interactive leadership style, i.e. Transformational Leadership. The females in their study focused on two skills (i) coaching and developing (ii) communicating.

Reinout et al., (2010) have focused on various styles of communication in leadership. Most organizations prefer a supportive communication style from their leader; however in family settings children were seen to be more adaptable with parents adopting a dominant communication style. In the light of the above literatures reviewed, the study focuses on throwing light on the leadership styles adopted by a mother of an autistic child, to help the child combat the difficulties faced by her, while adopting to the new-normal of staying indoors (and many such other changes, that the child could possibly come across in future), which is a change from her routine and also to make it as less stressful as possible for the child...

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research based on the case change in leadership styles adapted by a mother of a child with autism during the lockdown. The focus of the study was on how the mother has adapted to the new normal during this circumstance of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) in helping the child cope up with and adapt to learning from home, and doing all the activities from home. Observation method, coupled with an informal oral interview/ discussion with the mother was conducted to elicit information on the behaviour of the child and her ways of handling them and nurturing the child.

### **Research questions**

This study addresses the following research questions:

- a) Does a mother's role on a child be of a leader?
- b) Is there a specific leadership style, that a mother has to adapt while helping her child with special needs?
- c) Will constant switching between leadership styles on children with special needs be effective for them to effectively overcome and cope up with their stress, while also helping them adapt to their new normal routine?

### **Case study discussion**

Ms Shreya, a Mumbai based, thirteen year old was diagnosed with autism, since she was two. Her mother, Mrs Vinitha, who was working for a public sector bank, resigned her job, since Shreya's diagnosis of autism and decided to help the child cope up with her troubles. Shreya had been visiting a therapist at her locality, where she was helped in a lot of ways like learning, addressing her social needs issues, communication issues etc. But since lockdown of was imposed by the government to curb the spread of the corona virus on March 17, 2020, children have been confined to their homes. These children, to whom, this kind of an outlet was essential, had to undergo a terrible turmoil.

Behaviours of Shreya, being diagnosed as an autistic child are

Speech and understanding

1. She barely speaks or expresses her pain
2. Does not understand social cues
3. Trouble in starting a conversation or keep it going
4. She at time speaks in high pitch, when she wants to express something

Social Issues

Often restricted, rigid, and even obsessive in their behaviours, activities, and interests

1. Keeps flapping her hands
2. Attached to a keychain
3. She exhibits a sameness in her routine, way her toys and clothes are kept. Gets extremely upset, even, if there is a slightest disorder in the environment or her schedule.
4. When stressed, she exhibits aggression by yelling, crying breaking things and banging her head on the wall.
5. She has a tendency to hyper react when there is a dimness or brightness in the light and starts crying. Even to certain sounds, she reacts and starts yelling and crying.
6. She cannot mingle or play with kids of her age.

7. She does not like to be touched by people.
8. She does not understand other people's feelings or emotions.

To add on to this trouble, Shreya is also in the stage of attaining her puberty, which is adding on to the stress level that she is going through. Current study tries to examine the extent to which, Shreya's mother, is able to address her needs, while helping her overcome the stressful situations, while, helping cope up with the home atmosphere and at the same time, boosting her morale and working on the child's confidence in her as a leader. She has been switching over the leadership style from one to the other as demanded by the circumstance as described below...

Autocratic leadership is defined by a top-down approach when it comes to all decision-making, procedures, and policies within an organization. An autocratic leader focuses less on collecting input from the child and tends to make decisions for the child, that he or she is supposed to follow ...

Like, Soon after the lockdown was imposed and Shreya, aged 13, who has been diagnosed with a certain degree of autism, couldn't go to her learning centre for her activities. This increased her stress level all the more, as a result of which, she started throwing tantrums. When her mother spoke to her, understood her, set some rules for her, by which she could be engaged, as well as her tantrums thrown consequent to the lockdown restrictions of staying home...

As a mother, Mrs Vinitha has an objective in her mind, mentoring the child, while creating responsibility in Shreya, in spite of the stress, the child is undergoing, she also encourages the child and building the trust in the child, helping her, as well. A typical leader to follow, she is also helping the child, when there is excess outburst of stress in the form of tantrums thrown.

According to Siegel's research, children who experience a strong attachment early in life show the most likelihood to experience positive outcomes later in life. "Longitudinal studies have found that securely attached children appear to have a number of positive outcomes in their development. These include enhanced emotional flexibility, social functioning and cognitive abilities" (Siegel, 'Cassidy & Shaver 1999' 2001; p. 77).

This Leadership quality of Mrs. Vinitha has helped Shreya to realise her role of cleaning up the mess she creates at home, keep her books and other stationary in place after completing her task... this also makes her a bit responsible and engaged.

Mrs. Vinitha also at times switches her role to a transactional leader (Transactional leaders are those who lead by control, organization, and short-term planning, who adopt to "reward and punishment approach") where by, at times, she has to follow the "carrot and stick approach" --- which helps her control certain stubbornness exhibited by Shreya, like refusing to eat her fruits, or bringing back her unfinished tiffin from school etc. Thus, Mrs Vinitha switches her leadership approach towards her thirteen year old.

She also has a bureaucratic style of approach where she has laid down certain rules for Shreya, which Shreya is expected to follow and has been following like, for example, the moment Shreya wakes up, she has to do her bed, get fresh and come to the dining table for milk.

4. Vinitha Charismatic leadership is defined by a leader who uses their communication skills, persuasiveness, and charm to influence others. Charismatic leaders, given their ability to connect with people on a deep level, are especially, Vinitha has also, adopted a pleasant communication with Shreya which is persuasive and charming enough to influence the child, making an earnest attempt to communicate with her baby at a deep level and win her confidence. This helps the child also in developing a trust and count on factor on her mother.

5. Vinitha has been a transformational leader for Shreya, she has guided her, motivated the child in coping with the new normal of learning and playing from home and adapting to newer tasks, while inspiring her to learn the new art of online education and online therapy sessions with her special educators. "Playful parenting is a way to enter the child's world on the child's terms, in order to foster closeness, confidence and connection" (2001; p. 2). According to Sarah Burke, Karen M. Collins,

(2001) Leaders who display transformational leadership encourage their followers to look beyond their own specific needs and focus instead on the interests of overall development.

Shreya has developed a strong bonding with her mother and has started learning a lot of new things like folding small clothes, wearing her socks on her own, trying to tie her shoe lace, washing her hands thoroughly with soap. This also exhibits the traits of coaching leadership style, where the mother is the mentor of the child, who has been guiding her throughout.

7. Mrs Vinitha at times, adopts to democratic leadership style, where she asks Shreya to decide what has to be cooked for lunch or dinner, what is the dress she wants to wear for herself and Shreya for the morning, or what is the vegetable she wants to buy for the week. This has helped Shreya develop a little amount of creativity.

8. Collaborative and coaching leadership style : Some amount of collaborative leadership where she tries to collaboratively do tasks with Shreya, like sitting with dummy blocks and helping her with the building blocks. Playing the role of a classmate, and helping her learn. This helps Shreya with more collaborative way of learning. Vinitha, coaches Shreya and tires to bring in the best in her.... "Children need such joining experiences because they provide the emotional nourishment that developing minds require. Relationships that are 'connecting' and allow for collaboration appear to offer children a wealth of interpersonal closeness that supports the development of many domains, including social, emotional, and cognitive functioning" (Siegel, 2001; p. 78).

These are some leadership styles practised in helping a child with autism by her mother during the pandemic, when these children have to adapt themselves to the "new normal" of confining themselves to home.

A mother, by default falls under the category of an ethical leader who behaves in a principled way with values of integrity, respect, trust, fairness, transparency, and honesty.

### Conclusion

Leadership, has most often been discussed with relevance to managers. This current case of a mother's role as a leader in helping her child with special needs cope up with the lock down and her change in the styles of leadership as required by circumstance, has been of great help to the child. This case has proved that, mother, as leader can have a control over interpersonal and rewards and punishment, that often shape and mould a child and her behaviour. A mother's role, as a leader can also have a great influence on the child's motivation level, emotional strength, attitude and more importantly, her behaviour and performance. The role played by a mother as a leader, switching over to different styles, as and when required, has proved to have a great impact on the child's self image, which consequently affects her potential either, positively( when supportive, fair, encouraging) or negatively (unsupportive, inconsistent and critical). This will also affect the child's health and energy level, especially so, in the case of a child with special needs, who needs constant attention and care. The influence of a mother and the leadership style reaches greater proportions as the effects on the child (with special needs) will have an effect on the overall emotions and performance.

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