**Navigating Complex Family Dynamics: A Social Work Perspective on the Edwards Family Case**

# I. Introduction

Personal, health, and relational problems are intricately intertwined in the Edwards family case study. Sussex-based businessman Tom Edwards has to take care of his children, Alexander and Thomasina, after his wife, Jacinda, died in an accident. Tom, mourning his wife and bearing resentment towards his in-laws James and Elaine Davis, intensifies conflict. Alexander is a young rugby player who receives significant pressure from his father to continue playing even after he sustains multiple head injuries and develops considerable psychological problems. Thomasina faces a great deal of conflict because of her physical disability, Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), desire for independence, and climate activism, with her father and school. The main themes related to each family member are Tom’s grief and blame, Alexander’s health risks, and identity issues, Thomasina’s DMD struggle and desire to be more independent, and the conflicts between Tom and his parents-in-law. These dynamics depend on the socioeconomic status, health issues, and multifaceted family structures.

The purpose of this essay is to identify, contemplate and critically analyze these themes from the perspectives of anti-oppressive, anti-discriminative and anti-racial social work. By centring on Thomasina Edwards, it will discuss the improvements required for her present and future quality of life and support. Drawing from the human development and social relationships theories, the essay will explain how these theories form the base of social work practice and ethics. In addition, it will highlight the significance of adopting expert by experience perspective in order to improve professional practice and reflexivity. The essay will start with a description of essential ideas followed by a consideration of the specific requirements of Thomasina, analysis of the applicability of the theory, and incorporation of real-life examples of practice of social work.

**II. Pencil Sketch of Key Themes**

## A. Tom Edwards

Tom Edwards is an aspiring businessman and one of the most well to do men in Sussex; however, after the death of his wife, Jacinda, in a car accident at her parents’ house, a radical change occurs in him. Tom has substantial loss and blames his in-laws, James and Elaine Davis for the event which causes a lack of harmonious relationship and attempts to protect children from the in-laws. Another challenge involves having to juggle between his busy schedule that involves running a business and taking care of his children. Thomasina, his daughter, is a very ill child suffering from a critical condition known as Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), which makes him stressed through the extensive cost of her treatment. Tom’s involvement in rugby and his love for the sport, compounded by his participation in Alexander’s sports activity, make the relationship between the two strained especially when Alexander has health complications as a result of the sport.

## B. Alexander Edwards

15-year old Alexander Edwards is under pressure to perform Rugby, most especially, because his father is very passionate about it. Although Alexander has multiple head injuries and constant headaches, he decides to stay and play because he has no idea of who he is and what his role is without hockey. This pressure has, therefore, increasingly caused severe emotional strain and personal confusion and conflict, not least because his health questions the sustainability of his rugby career. Alexander’s case describes an important dilemma of consuming self-driving goals and following the health protocols.

## C. Thomasina Edwards

Thomasina Edwards is a 13-year-old girl with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy – a disease that hinders the body’s muscles and strength-limited and constantly weakening. Despite the medical complications that Thomasina has, she pursues for her independence and participates in climate change activism that constitutes her rebellion and defiance with her father and school. Her clandestine affection for her grandma, Elaine Davis, whom she communicated through her nurse reveals that she requires interpersonal affection apart from her parents and siblings. This private communication shows there is emotional turmoil in the family, and Thomasina, in particular, is frustrated and turns to her grandmother for comfort.

## D. James and Elaine Davis

James and Elaine Davis, Jacinda’s parents, are mourning the loss of their daughter and do not speak to their son-in-law, Tom Edwards. Tom has blamed them for Jacinda’s death and resentment that they tried to reduce their contact with their grandchildren. Nevertheless, the Davises are very keen to be involved with their grandchildren. Currently, Elaine, a senior practice nurse, secretly supplies ***items of*** comfort and care to Thomasina. Tom tries to prevent James, a local pastor and childhood friend, from watching Alexander during rugby matches but James sneak to see Alexander.

## E. Personal and Professional Factors Considered

When addressing these themes social work practice should be anti-oppressive, anti discriminative and anti-racist. Such an approach ensures that prejudices are recognized and eliminated and the family remains supportive and accepting of all members. It is evident that socioeconomic status, health conditions, and familial relationships are important determinants of family functioning in the case of the Edwards family. All these aspects of the story, including Tom’s wealth and status, Thomasina’s illness, and the relations between the generations, are important to develop interactions and well-being among the characters. These dynamics are important to consider when designing interventions aimed at helping each family member and improving the overall functioning of the family.

# III. Critical Evaluation of Theories, Concepts, and Social Relationships

## A. Theories and Concepts Relevant to the Case

### Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is the joint work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (see Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991). Drawing on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysis, John Bowlby formulated the basic tenets of the theory. He thereby revolutionized the concepts about a child’s tie to the mother and its disruption through separation, deprivation, and bereavement.

Mary Ainsworth’s innovative methodology not only made it possible to test some of Bowlby’s ideas empirically but also helped expand the theory itself and is responsible for some of the new directions it is now taking. Ainsworth contributed the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world. In addition, she formulated the concept of maternal sensitivity to infant signals and its role in the development of infant–mother attachment patterns.

The theory posits that early relationships with caregivers shape individuals' attachment styles and influence their emotional and social development. Tom's strained relationship with his in-laws and his overbearing involvement in Alexander's rugby career may stem from his own attachment patterns and unresolved grief. Similarly, Thomasina's secretive bond with her grandmother Elaine highlights her need for a secure attachment figure outside her immediate family (Bowlby, 1988).

### Systems Theory

Systems Theory, as articulated by Bronfenbrenner, views the family as a complex system where each member's behavior affects and is affected by others. The Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory lays stress on the quality and context of the child´s surroundings. Bronfenbrenner maintains that because the child develops, the interaction with the environments acquires a complex nature. The chance for complexity appears since the physical and cognitive structures of a child grow and mature. (Härkönen, 2001). The Edwards family's dynamics can be understood through this lens, where Tom's grief and authoritarian parenting style impact Alexander and Thomasina's emotional well-being. The interdependence between family members, such as Elaine's covert support of Thomasina and James's attendance at rugby matches, illustrates the interconnectedness and feedback loops within the family system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### Human Development and Lifespan Perspective

The Human Development and Lifespan Perspective emphasizes the importance of considering developmental stages and life transitions. This entails psychological development, with a special focus on the periods of youth, adulthood and old age (Peterson, 2003). These phases, like infancy and childhood before them, are exciting periods of developmental change. As adolescents embark upon mature lives independently, and as adults progress through the successive milestones and turning points of mature life, new opportunities for psychological growth are continually presented.

At the same time, the range of available choices may narrow, losses arise, and problems and disappointments will almost certainly occur. These adversities, too, provide the impetus and opportunity for psychological adjustment, and gains in maturity can arise out of successful coping late in life, just as they did during childhood. The lifespan approach to the study of human development seeks to understand these continuities and discontinuities in psychological growth and change over the whole of life (DeRobertis and Bland, 2020).

Thomasina's experience with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) requires an understanding of her developmental needs and challenges at different life stages. This perspective helps in planning her care and ensuring that interventions support her physical, emotional, and social development over time. Similarly, Alexander's identity crisis related to his rugby career can be better understood by considering his adolescent developmental stage and the importance of peer and parental validation during this period (Erikson, 1968).

## B. Social Relationships and Their Impact on the Family

### Parent-Child Dynamics

Power dynamics exist in the Edwards family, especially in the roles of the parent and the child, which are depicted through the character of Tom. His encouragement of Alexander and desire for him to play rugby despite potential health risks might stem from an unresolved ambition or a need to dominate. This creates quite a toxic relationship dynamic that may cause emotional distress for Alexander as he tries to live up to his father’s expectations. Likewise, Tom may overprotect Thomasina because he lost his beloved wife and is afraid of losing another family member, thus her freedom is taken away.

### Extended Family Involvement

The role of the extended family member especially James and Elaine Davis is also quite central in the dynamics of the Edwards family. Even when Tom tries to keep Elaine and James away from their grandchildren, Thomasina and James’ secret meetings and James’ attendance of rugby matches depict their relentless support and care for their grandchildren. This maintains the family origin of the children and gives them necessary emotional support which is very important for their psychological health. However, the conflict existing between Tom and his in-laws also poses an additional pressure on family as well as increases family relationship’s complexity (McGoldrick, 2011).

### Professional and Caregiver Relationships

The relations with other professional caregivers like Thomasina’ s nurse Janet are also necessary. Janet’s resignation after the scuffle in the hospital shows just how stressful it is and that family issues do affect working relationships. Careful cooperation between caregivers and family members is crucial to offering comprehensive and coherent care. Thus, relationships with these professionals have to be carefully managed and professional assistance provided by a social worker has to reflect the needs and family dynamics properly (Munro, 2011).

# IV. The life of Thomasina Edwards

## A. Current Situation and Challenges

Thomasina Edwards aged 13 has been diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), a rare genetic disorder that mainly affects boys and girls very rarely. DMD results in loss of muscle strength and motor coordination, thus, they receive conservative treatment and require frequent visits to several specialists and monitoring of the girl’s physical state. Thomasina sometimes uses a wheelchair and he is completely bed-bound, needing 24-hour care at home. This situation greatly affects the physical functioning of her everyday life and requires a substantial amount of medical management and care (Bushby & Agrawal, 2010).

Other than medical aspects, Thomasina’s emotional and social life are important concerns in the play. She is overprotected because of her father who is still grieving the loss of his wife and fears losing his daughter as well. This results in emotional stress and the feeling of being left on one’s own. Furthermore, the participation in climate change protest shows that she wants to be involved in society and wants to be independent. As for the covert contact with her grandmother, Elaine, it also emphasizes her desire for support and contact outside the nuclear family sphere (Hendriksen et al. , 2009).

## B. Required Changes for a Better Quality of Life

Providing Thomasina with the best physical care encompasses not only her present course of treatments but also newer forms of treatment. This includes access to state of the art research and clinical trial that may make her life better and may even increase her longevity. Physiotherapy, use of assistive devices and constant revision of the care plan should be done frequently. Moreover, nurturing a home supportive of her physical requirements without limiting her freedom is important (Mendell et al. , 2012).

Secondly, it implies that besides Thomasina’s physical ailment, her emotional and psychological needs must also be treated. She can get professional counseling to help her talk and go through the emotional aspects of having a chronic illness. Family therapy could assist in better communication between family members especially between Thomasina and her father, and even help address the core issues that arose from the death of Jacinda. Psychosocial needs can be addressed through open and direct communication between the girl and her family about her condition and what she wants, thereby creating a more accepting environment around her (Weiss, 2004).

Additionally, Thomasina’s learning and interpersonal relationships are also essentials of her life experience. To achieve this, there is need for her school to facilitate her physical requirements while at the same time fostering social integration. This may include differentiated instruction, use of instructional materials, and related services from personnel with qualifications in serving students with disabilities. Including her in organizational activities such as climate change activism will also improve her feeling of relevance among her peers. In this case, schools can be very helpful in ensuring that she has all the support she needs to progress academically and socially (Dyson, 2005).

The process of promoting Thomasina’s independence means that her strengths should be valued, not her weaknesses. This may be done by including her in decision making processes concerning her care and engagements. Letting her perform tasks within her capabilities will assist her in developing her confidence and feeling more independent. It is therefore important for the girl to be empowered to raise her needs within the family and other social settings in order to enhance her growth and development (Thorne, 2005).

## C. Long-Term Care and Planning

Paying for innovative research that could change the course of DMD is one of the ways in which Tom Edwards could prepare for the future of Thomasina. Some of the goals that can make a difference in her life is being an advocate for clinical trials and research on causes and cures for diseases that have no cure today. Interacting with the research institutions and advocacy groups can help the family update itself with the latest development and whether Thomasina can be a candidate for any of the new therapies (Bushby et al. , 2010).

Educating Thomasina is a process that requires the long-term strategy to meet her needs as she grows older. These include; vocational training, life skills education and assessing a living arrangement that will enable her to live independently while receiving any medical attention that she may need. Integration with social workers, healthcare professionals, and schools and colleges will help in this transition and support Thomasina to become an independent and productive citizen. Decisions regarding her future should involve her and should acknowledge her interests and plans for her life (Lindsay, 2011).

# V. Application of Theory and Research

## A. Use of Human Development Theories

The physical development of Thomasina is significantly impaired due to Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD). Stage theories like Piaget’s cognitive developmental stages and Erikson’s psychosocial developmental stages explain how DMD affects her developmental progress. For instance, Erikson’s psychosocial theory focuses on the industry versus inferiority stage in childhood in which children gain feelings of accomplishment from interpersonal and academic experiences (Erikson, 1968). Thomasina’s illness presents physical limitations that affect her physical well-being, which may affect her perceived competence and worth. Knowledge of these developmental stages enables one to establish interventions that are in coherence with her cognitive and psychosocial development.

Since Thomasina has this medical condition, she experiences a remarkable growth in terms of her social and emotional development. Referring to Vygotsky’s social development theory, social interaction is crucial in the cognitive development process (Vygotsky, 1978). Thomasina’s willingness to engage in climate change activism indicates her need for social relevance and meaningful activities. Such activities can improve her self-esteem and social interactions, which go a long way in addressing the isolative nature of the health condition. Through activism she gets a sense of belonging and an opportunity to make a difference thereby enhancing her emotional well being and social adjustment.

## B. The Role of Social Relationships in Shaping Thomasina’s Experiences

The family relationships are significant in conditioning Thomasina’s experiences. According to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, it is necessary to focus on microsystem, namely the family, and mesosystem, which is an interaction between the family and other environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The lack of a good relationship between Tom and his side of the family affects Thomasina’s support structure. Despite being financially and physically supportive, Tom overly protects her, which denies her opportunity to be independent. The conversations with her grandmother Elaine, who she secretly meets, give her essential emotional support and another view on life. Presumably, these familial relationships could be reinforced through family therapy and improve the emotional environment surround Thomasina.

Thomasina is an active child who is engaged in peers’ relations and activism. According to Erikson’s stage of psychosocial development, social relations play an important role in the formation of personality during adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Being involved in climate change protests allows Thomasina, on one hand, to communicate with like like-minded peers. These interactions are very helpful when it comes to social development of the woman and also they give her a sense of belonging and identity. Supporting her engagement in such activities might help alleviate her loneliness and enable her to assert herself and fight for others, enhancing her agency and self-efficacy.

## C. Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Discriminatory Practices

Embracing the principles of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice requires an understanding of some forms of bias that may influence Thomasina’s interactions and care. The medical model of disability has been found to emphasize the impairments a person has over what the person is capable of doing, thus reinforcing prejudice and exclusion (Oliver, 1990). Developing more accessible and inclusive communities based on the social model of disability will benefit Thomasina. For example, ensuring that her school has made adequate provisions and is sensitive to the needs of disabled students will enable her to fully participate in academic and other related activates.

Thomasina must have equal opportunities just like other students as a basic principle of health and physical education. This embraces the aspect of health, education, as well as social contact with other people. In social work, anti-discriminatory practice means that the person must be defended from discrimination and equally be given chances just as any other person. For example, enabling her to partake in the groundbreaking DMD research offers potential therapeutic benefits to her beside capturing her interest in scientific advancements affecting her personally (Hughes, 2010). Furthermore, making sure that her activism is backed and her input recognized in such movements can also help in boosting her own feeling of power and involvement in the society.

# VI. Expert by Experience Perspective

## A. Importance of Incorporating Lived Experiences

The experiences of Thomasina and her grandparents can be used to provide rich information that can enhance her care in many ways. Thomasina’s real-life account of the life of a DMD patient empowers her to express her requirements, struggles, and dreams accurately. Her participation in activist events such as climate change protests thus must be considered as an expression of her pursuit for ad independence and social involvement. Likewise her grandparents, Elaine and James Davis, who lost their daughter and are very much involved with the grandchildren, can provide invaluable subjective information on emotional and social aspects of the family. Knowledge of Thomasina’s emotional state, as well as their willingness to address these concerns, can help to foster better treatment planning based on patients’ needs (Beresford, 2007).

Including Thomasina and her grandparents’ views makes it possible to tailor the care to be given to Thomasina based on her needs and not what she is assumed to want. This approach involves ensuring that they are included in decision making processes thus giving them a chance to express their concerns, desires, and anticipations. For example, comprehending that Thomasina needs more control might result in developing ways to provide her with the opportunities to make choices regarding her schedule and care. In the same manner, understanding what her grandparents offer to her can be useful in planning tactics that will improve these relationships, like arranging supervised visits and promoting communication of the child and her grandparents with all the other members of the family and caregivers (Carr, 2004).

## B. Enhancing Professional Development and Reflexivity

Gaining insight into the experiences of service users such as Thomasina and her family is relevant for the continuing education of social workers. Such insights enable professionals to consider the effects of their activities and the everyday experiences of the people they assist. For example, the portrayal of Thomasina’s fight for patient advocacy emphasizes the need to account for the social and emotional aspects of life with a chronic illness. From such accounts, social workers get to learn and appreciate the importance of such issues as social participation and advocacy that empower the young DISABLED persons to gain and find meaning in their lives. These can then assist in developing comprehensive and person-focused interventions in health care (Hammell, 2015).

Furthermore, it highly integrates reflexivity and feedback when identifying specific or generalized ways of improving the nature, characteristics, and methods of social work practices to better fit the needs and demands of individuals. Integrating service user involvement into day to day practice ensures that the information and knowledge gained is actually implemented, increasing the actualization of effective and empathetic intervention. For instance, understanding the anxiety that Thomasina experiences due to her father’s protective behavior can help social workers take measures to encourage the development of better and healthier care interventions aimed at maintaining her independence while preventing dangerous situations. Further, awareness of her grandparents’ supportiveness suggests that more family-centered treatments can improve the utilization of these relationships. This reflexive practice is an effective way of ensuring that social work stays relevant and meets the needs of the people it serves as suggested by Schon (1983).

# VII. Conclusion

This essay has outlined the dynamics of the social problem in the case of the Edwards family and especially Thomasina Edwards who suffers from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy(DMD). It talked about the psychological, social, developmental and family aspects of her condition, with issues of family dysfunction resulting from grief and coping style dysphoria being specifically highlighted. Concretely, using and analyzing the critiques of such frameworks as Attachment Theory, Systems Theory, and the Human Development and Lifespan Perspective helped to understand the better ways of fostering the family support and care. Thus, social interactions, such as grandparents’ caring for Thomasina and her participation in activism, were highlighted as crucial for her psychological and social development.

This case shows that more comprehensive and integrative forms of social work interventions are required. Since Thomasina has physical, emotional, and social disabilities, her care should involve medical treatment, counseling, and social interaction. Promoting Thomasina’s rights and addressing her needs involve adoption of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory measures. The knowledge of service users’ real-life stories allows social workers to develop better interventions based on the client’s best interest and experience. It not only enhances the standard of service delivery but also enhances the human worth of service users through genuine recognition of their opinions and experiences.

The integration of theory and research in social work which is the process of directing and utilizing theory involves enhanced quality in the lives of both individuals and families. On a theoretical perspective, theories offer a framework that helps to classify and analyze human conduct and growth while on a practical level, research offers practical interventions that can be ‘customized’ to the learners’ peculiarities. In the case of Thomasina, the use of developmental theories aids in identifying areas of difficulty as well as areas of strength in order to foster her independence and healthy development. Information about DMD and new methods of treatment affect her physical condition and future. Finally, an integrated, evidence-based, and strengths perspective in social work practice meets not only the basic needs but also builds sustainable protective resources for those in need and empowers them to overcome future adversities with pride and assistance.

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