

Maternal Disciplinary Techniques in Australia and India

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ABSTRACT This research was conducted in Australia and India. In the first phase, data were collected in Brisbane, Australia and in the second phase, data were collected in Hisar, India. One hundred Australian and 100 Indian mothers of preschool-aged children constituted the sample. A questionnaire was used to gather information on family demographics and mothers' beliefs and practices about disciplinary techniques. The results of this study indicated that although Australian and Indian mothers had similar practices, cultural differences were also found to exist. In both cultures, mothers practised reasoning (induction) technique and believed that children respond better to reasoning. Mothers also used a combination of reasoning and punishment and believed that children respond better to this technique. A few Australian mothers, under certain circumstances, believed deprivation of privileges to be more effective. A percentage of Indian mothers, on the other hand, used and believed physical punishment to be better technique than any other technique. Compared to less educated mothers, more educated mothers in both cultural groups were less likely to use physical punishment and more likely to make children understand (induction). Mothers used similar disciplinary techniques for preschool-aged sons and daughters.

INTRODUCTION

The need to examine parenting practices across cultures have been emphasised by many researchers in order to better understand children's development. Also cross-cultural studies of parenting practices can increase our knowledge of theories of socialisation. The literature surveyed demonstrates that many of the norms of child-rearing, parenting beliefs and practices are set in Western countries. (Honig and Chung, 1989; Kapur, Girimaji, Prabhu, Reddy and Kaliaperumal, 1994; Srivastava, 1990; Zayas, 1994). Parenting beliefs and practices within a culture serve an important function, enabling the

individual to meet sociocultural requirements (McGillicuddy-DiLisi and Sigel, 1995).

Discipline is an important aspect of parenting practices. Patterns of disciplining help us to understand how children are socialized.

Discipline means parenting practices aimed at teaching children socialized behaviour and self-control (Honig and Wittmer, 1991). Parenting beliefs about disciplinary techniques may have impact on their real life practices. Kochanska (1990) and Kochanska, Kuczynski and Radke-Yarrow (1989) found that the attitudes, mothers hold about child-rearing practices were related to their parenting practices in real life. Mothers who believed in an authoritarian pattern of child rearing were found to use controlling and directive methods with their children during naturalistic interactions. Whereas mothers who believed in authoritative pattern were more likely to use indirect and positive ways of controlling children.

Cross-cultural studies indicate that there are cultural similarities and variations in parental approaches to raising and disciplining children (e.g. Bachtold, 1982; Honig and Chung, 1989). Parents use a wide range of techniques to control problem behaviours such as spanking, scolding, deprivation of privileges or isolating children. Parents prefer to use reasoning except in situations where children exhibit aggressive behaviour. Roopnarine, Lu and Ahmeduzzaman (1989) found significant cultural differences with regard to disciplinary methods in India and Malaysia. Compared to Indian parents, Malaysian parents were more likely to use physical punishment. Whereas, Indian parents were more likely to use verbal feedback when disciplining children.

In another cross-cultural study, Power,

Kobayashi-Winata and Kelley (1992) compared child-rearing patterns in Japan and United States. In the United States mothers controlled their children's social behaviour with social or material consequences. In contrast, Japanese mothers were more likely to use reasoning and scolding to correct the misbehaviour of their children. When children directly confronted authority, Japanese mothers were more likely to use physical punishment.

Parents may use different disciplinary techniques for their sons and daughters. In a recent study, Bronstein (1994) found that parents tended to use different control techniques for sons and daughters. Parents were more likely to use physical control with sons possibly because sons tended to be more aggressive than daughters. For daughters, parents tended to use indirect control (psychological control). Compared to sons, fathers regarded daughters as more docile and used less direct control with them. Socio-economic status of the family was also related to parent-child behaviour. Parents from lower socio-economic status were more likely to be coercive. While in middle socio-economic families parents were more likely to use supportive guidance.

If one wishes to learn about disciplinary techniques used at home and their differences and similarities across cultures, then mothers of children are the best source of information (Whiting and Whiting, 1975).

In this study an attempt is made to contribute to cross-cultural research by examining cross-cultural similarities and differences in maternal beliefs and practices about disciplinary techniques in Australia and India. The aim of the research reported in this paper was to examine: Are there cultural similarities and differences in

1. maternal beliefs about whether children respond better to reason or to punishment,
2. maternal beliefs about *why* children respond better to reason or to punishment, and
3. maternal disciplinary techniques used at home?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Subjects

In this study participants were mothers of four to six year old preschool-aged children from Australia and India. In Brisbane, Australia, moth-

ers of 45 girls and 55 boys; and in Hisar, India, mothers of 44 girls and 56 boys participated. The feasibility of the research necessitated nonprobability sampling.

Study One

The first phase the study was conducted in Brisbane, Australia. A number of child care centres, kindergartens and preschools were approached for participation of the mothers involved with those centres. As Australia is a multicultural country having families from different origin places, mothers were invited to participate if they were White Australians. Mothers of 100 children constituted the Australian sample.

Study Two

The second phase of the data collection was made in Hisar (India). Families were contacted through seven schools with lower and upper kindergarten classes. The educational levels of Indian mothers was matched with the educational level of Australian mothers. In the Indian sample, 100 mothers constituted the sample.

A higher proportion of mothers (63%), Australian and Indian, were university educated. Diploma holders/senior grade constituted 17%, and matric/middle 20% of the sample. Of the Australian mothers, 33% were working full time, 32% were working part-time and 26% were home managers, and in India, 29% were working full time, 10% were working part-time and 61% were home managers.

Measures

A questionnaire was used to gather information on family demographics and mothers' beliefs about their children's response to disciplinary techniques. Mothers were asked an open-ended question: *Does your child respond better to reason or to punishment and why?* Mothers were asked to support their opinion *why* did they believe particular disciplinary technique was useful. Mothers were also requested to rate on a 5 point scale ranging from, 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*), how often they use different disciplinary techniques when their child does something wrong.

In Brisbane, Australia, questionnaires were sent to the mothers who had volunteered to participate in the study. They were provided with

reply-paid envelopes to return the completed questionnaires.

In India interviews were conducted as participants from Hisar expressed a preference for interviews over questionnaires. In an Indian study, Malhotra and Randhawa (1983) had suggested that a structured interview schedule was more suitable than a self-administered questionnaire. It is important to note that the *interviews* actually consisted of writing the mothers' reports by posing the questions from the questionnaire to mothers orally. Oral probes were not used so that interviews were equivalent to the questionnaires given in the Australian study, as far as possible. Interviews took place in the family home.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 6.1.3 was used to analyse data. Mothers' beliefs about whether children respond better to reason or to punishment and their ideas about *why* their children respond better to that technique are described by percentages and χ^2 was used to see the significant cultural differences. Extent to which various disciplinary techniques used at home, are examined using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to see the effect of culture, gender of child and educational level of mothers. In the MANOVA, *F* statistics for Wilk's Lambda are presented. Where significance ($p < .05$) was found, univariate analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were then computed to explore where differences between groups lay.

RESULTS

Presented in table 1 are the percentages of maternal beliefs about whether children respond better to reason or to punishment. The results indicate similarities as well as cultural differences. A greater percentage of Australian (41%) and Indian mothers (47%), reported that children respond better to a "combination of both", reason and punishment. In both cultures, about equal number of mothers (Australian, 44%; Indian, 40%) indicated that their children respond better to "reason". Although percentages were low, in contrast to Australian mothers, Indian mothers (12%) indicated children respond better to physical punishment. In comparison to Indian mothers, more Australian mothers (11%) indi-

cated depriving children of privileges works better.

Table 1: Maternal Beliefs: Children Respond Better to Reason or to Punishment

Maternal Beliefs	Mothers	
	Australia <i>n</i> = 100 (%)	India <i>n</i> = 100 (%)
Reason	44.0	40.0
A combination of reason and punishment	41.0	47.0
Punishment	4.0	12.0
Deprivation of privileges	11.0	1.0

$$\chi^2 = 18.49, df (3), p = .000$$

Maternal beliefs about various disciplinary techniques are presented in Table 2. A higher proportion of mothers believed that a combination of reason and punishment works better depending upon the situation. These mothers more often said *punishment when reason doesn't work; when doesn't respond to reason then punished; when things go out of hand then punished; both are used only when appropriate; or punishment is not much use without reason.*

Table 2: Maternal Beliefs about Various Disciplinary Techniques

Maternal Beliefs	Mothers	
	Australia <i>n</i> = 100 (%)	India <i>n</i> = 100 (%)
Reasons make sense to children	44.0	40.0
Combination of reason and punishment works better depending on situation	41.0	47.0
Punishment works better	4.0	12.0
Deprivation of privileges works better than reason and punishment	11.0	1.0

$$\chi^2 = 18.49, df (3), p = .000$$

A substantial proportion of mothers believed children respond better to reason as reasons make sense to children. These mothers more often cited that *it makes sense; this is the way to approach things and it lays the foundation for future behaviour; needs to understand everything- maintain a loving relationship; if explained child seems satisfied that you are fair; or child should know the reasons.*

A proportion of Indian mothers believed punishment works better and more often cited

that *punishment is usually effective; sometimes too silly and needs a smack; doesn't take notice of talking; reason does nothing; punishment usually is a stronger method to ensure it is not repeated; too young to reason; punishment lets him know what he done has made me concerned enough to take action.*

In comparison to Indian mothers, more Australian mothers indicated depriving children of privileges works better than reason and punishment. These mothers reported *very stubborn and depriving of privileges seems to work better; always argues with reasons- can't argue about no TV or being on bed; tends to pretend that he doesn't understand-no TV works.*

χ^2 was computed to examine the cultural differences in parental beliefs about children's response to various disciplinary techniques as well as their opinion about *why* did they believe particular disciplinary technique works better. There were significant differences in two cultural groups, $\chi^2(3, n = 200) = 18.49, p = .000$.

Disciplinary Strategies used at Home

A three-way MANOVA was run to see the effects of culture (Australian, Indian), sex of child (boy, girl) and educational level of mothers (university, diploma/senior grade, matric/middle) on disciplinary techniques used at home: depriving child of privileges (DCP), ignoring child's behaviour (IG), making child understand (MCU), using physical punishment (UPP), and verbal reprimand (VREP). This was followed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and post-hoc Scheffe test with alpha 0.05 level of significance to clarify significant multivariate effects. F statistics for Wilk's Lambda are reported. Significant main effects resulted for culture, $F(5,183) = 34.34, p = .000$; and education, $F(10,366) = 9.61, p = .000$. The main effect for the sex of child was not significant, $F(5,183) = .85, p = .58$. Two way interactions for educational level of mothers by sex of child, $F(10,366) = 0.70, p = .73$ and culture by sex of child, $F(5,183) = 1.41, p = .22$ were not significant. Similarly three way interaction for culture by sex of child by educational level of mothers was not significant, $F(10,366) = 1.47, p = .24$. A strong two way interaction resulted for culture by educational level of mothers, $F(10,366) = 4.98, p = .000$. Because this was interaction effect

related to culture and educational level of mothers, only the interactions are discussed and not the main effects.

Univariate F-tests for culture by educational level of mothers were significant for making child understand and using physical punishment, $F_s(2,187) = 17.80$ and 8.60 respectively, $p_s = .000$. Follow-up Scheffe test at 0.05 significance of level revealed that, as shown in Table 3, Australian university educated mothers were more likely to make their child understand ($M = 4.85$) than Australian mothers educated up to matric/middle level ($M = 4.23$) and Indian mothers educated up to diploma/senior grade and matric/middle level ($M_s = 4.00$ and 3.85 respectively). Australian mothers educated up to diploma/senior grade and matric/middle level ($M_s = 4.65$ and 4.23 respectively) were more likely to make their child understand than Indian mothers educated up to matric/middle level. Indian university educated mothers were more likely to make their child understand ($M = 4.43$) than Indian mothers educated up to matric/middle level ($M = 3.85$).

With regard to using physical punishment, Australian university educated mothers were less likely to use physical punishment ($M = 1.70$) than Australian mothers educated up to diploma/senior grade and matric/middle level ($M_s = 2.25$ and 2.52 respectively) and Indian mothers in different educational groups. Australian mothers educated up to diploma/senior grade were less likely to use physical punishment than Indian mothers educated up to diploma/senior grade and matric/middle level. Australian mothers educated up to matric/middle level were less likely to use physical punishment than Indian mothers educated up to matric/middle level. Indian university educated mothers were less likely to use physical punishment ($M = 2.27$) than Indian mothers educated up to diploma/senior grade and matric/middle level ($M_s = 3.25$ and 3.35 respectively). Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.

DISCUSSION

In this study, maternal beliefs about children's response to various disciplinary techniques, maternal ideas about why their children respond better to that particular technique and

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for Disciplinary Techniques Used at Home (Culture by Education of Mothers Differences)

Disciplinary Techniques and Educational Level of Mothers	n	Australia (n = 100)		India (n = 100)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Deprive Child of Privileges (DCP)					
University/College Educated	63	2.87	1.11	2.06	1.01
Diploma/Senior Grade	17	3.15	1.38	2.10	1.26
Matriculate/Middle	20	3.05	1.22	2.19	1.02
Ignore Child's Behaviour (IG)					
University/College Educated	63	2.07	0.83	1.54	0.74
Diploma/Senior Grade	17	1.96	0.90	1.51	0.51
Matriculate/Middle	20	2.16	1.02	1.70	0.80
Make Child Understand (MCU)*					
University/College Educated	63	4.85a	0.37	4.43 ¹	0.59
Diploma/Senior Grade	17	4.65 ¹	0.49	4.00b	0.92
Matriculate/Middle	20	4.23b ¹	0.52	3.85b ²	0.70
Use Physical Punishment (UPP)*					
University/College Educated	63	1.70a	0.53	2.27b	0.79
Diploma/Senior Grade	17	2.25b	0.79	3.25d	0.70
Matriculate/Middle	20	2.52c	0.52	3.35e	0.72
Verbal Reprimand (VREP)					
University/College Educated	63	3.96	0.96	3.01	0.98
Diploma/Senior Grade	17	4.05	0.94	3.30	0.86
Matriculate/Middle	20	4.09	0.90	3.33	0.94

Note: For MCU: a > b and 1 > 2, *p = .000; for UPP: a < b, c, d, e; b < d, e; c < e, *p = .000

the extent to which various disciplinary techniques used at home were examined in Australia and India. The results indicate that there are both cultural similarities and differences in maternal beliefs about disciplinary techniques.

In both cultures, mothers indicated that children respond better to a range of disciplinary techniques: reason, combination of reason and punishment, deprivation of privileges and physical punishment. Previous research also indicates that parents use a wide range of disciplinary methods to control social behaviour of their children. They may explain the consequences of their children's action, may use praise and reward or may use physical punishment and verbal reprimand to discipline their children when not behaving in a socially approved way (Bachtold, 1982; Honig and Chung, 1989; Kelley et al., 1992; Ross, 1984; Shure, 1983; Shure and Spivack, 1981).

In both cultural groups, a higher percentage of mothers indicated that their children respond better to a combination of reason and punishment technique. These findings get the support from Hoffman's (1994) theory of "internalisation". She reports that most parental inductions (reasons) also possess power-assertive qualities.

If the discipline contains less reasoning or inductions then children may ignore the actual message to think about others feelings. On the other hand, if parents use more power assertive methods then children may become anxious about their own behaviour. To make children learn about the consequences of their acts on others an appropriate level of reasoning is very important. Also in both cultural groups, a substantial proportion of mothers indicated that their children respond better to reasoning. Literature indicates that parents strongly recognise the importance of reasoning (e.g. Bachtold, 1982; Najman et al., 1994; Roberts et al., 1985; Ross, 1984).

That more Australian mothers used deprivation of privileges might be because they believe it is a useful disciplinary technique under certain circumstances for teaching the child approved social behaviour. Mothers supported their beliefs by responses such as *very stubborn and depriving of privileges seems to work better; always argues with reasons-can't argue about no TV*. Also possibly it might be a culture specific practice. In a cross-cultural study, Power et al. (1992) found that mothers in United States

controlled their children's social behaviour with material consequences.

Indian mothers were more likely to use physical punishment than Australian mothers. These findings are in line with Indian research that Hindu mothers are more likely to express aggression toward their children (Singh et al., 1987). Within their tradition, the perceived superiority of the husband makes him an inappropriate object of aggression; children on the other hand, are an easy target of anger and frustration. Although the religion of the mothers is not reported in the present study, all of the families were Hindu. In another study Kaur et al. (1981) report that with regard to disciplining children, mothers were more likely to use physical punishment and scolding, whereas withdrawal of affection among them was negligible. The authors report that sometimes mothers punish children just to release their anger. Kelley et al. (1992) also report that mothers may use physical punishment as a "behavioural practice" (p. 578) and there may be other factors contributing to this practice.

Australian mothers in all the three educational groups were more likely to make their children understand than less educated Indian mothers. Within culture, more educated mothers were more likely to make their children understand and less likely to use physical punishment than less educated mothers. These results get support from an Australian study by Najman et al. (1994) indicating that compared to more educated mothers, less educated mothers were less likely to use reasoning and more likely to use physical punishment.

With regard to differential treatment of sons and daughters, this study does not support the findings by Bronstein (1994) that parents tend to use different control techniques for sons and daughters. One of the reason might be that in the present study the participants were mothers of preschool-aged children (4 to 6 years). Mothers may use similar techniques of discipline for young children.

In conclusion, mothers recognize the importance of reasoning and believe that children respond better to reasoning. Mothers also use and believe that children respond better to a combination of reasoning and punishment depending upon the situation. A few Australian mothers,

under certain circumstances, believe deprivation of privileges to be more effective. On the other hand, Indian mothers use and believe physical punishment works better than any other technique in certain situations. Compared to less educated mothers, in both cultural groups, more educated mothers are less likely to use physical punishment and more likely to make children understand (induction). Mothers use similar disciplinary techniques for preschool-aged sons and daughters.

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