

Paternal Disciplinary Styles in Two Cultures : Australia and India

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ABSTRACT Fifty five Australian and 55 Indian fathers of 4 to 6 years old children participated in the present study. A questionnaire was used to gather information on family demographics and fathers beliefs and practices about disciplinary styles. The results of this study indicated cultural similarities and differences. In both cultures, fathers were more likely to use induction and believed that children respond better to reasoning (percentages were higher for Indian fathers) and a combination of reasoning and punishment. A few Australian fathers also believed that children respond better to punishment and deprivation of privileges. Compared to more educated fathers, less educated fathers in both cultural groups were more likely to use verbal reprimand, deprivation of privileges and physical punishment. Fathers in both cultural groups practised similar disciplinary methods for 4 to 6 years old sons and daughters.

INTRODUCTION

Family is the first socialisation agency for young children. Children learn culturally and socially approved behaviour through parental child-rearing practices (Bose, 1984). One of the component of child-rearing practices is discipline. Children are taught socially appropriate behaviour through discipline (Honig and Wittmer, 1991). Parental disciplinary practices might be influenced by their beliefs about discipline. Kochanska and associates (Kochanska, 1990; Kochanska et al., 1989) examined maternal beliefs and practices and found that maternal practices in real life were related to their attitudes about child-rearing practices. Mothers who believed in authoritative pattern of child-rearing were more likely to use positive ways of controlling children's behaviour.

Across cultures parents use a wide range of methods to control behaviour of children. These methods include spanking, scolding deprivation of privileges or isolating children.

Parents prefer to use reasoning except in situations where children exhibit aggressive behaviour (e.g., Bachtold, 1982 ; Honig and Chung, 1989).

Many researches have emphasised the need to examine parenting practices across cultures in order to better understand children's development. Cross-cultural studies also increase our knowledge about how children are socialised across cultures. The surveyed literature indicates that many of the norms of child-rearing, parenting beliefs and practices are set in North America (Zayas, 1994). Therefore, it is important to investigate child rearing practices in different cultures (Kapur et al., 1994 ; Srivastava, 1990). Little research has examined father-child relationship of young children. The majority of research has studied the mother-child relationship (Srivastava, 1990; Tennent and Berthelsen, 1997). Russell and Russell (1987) suggests that although mothers are more involved in child-rearing, little is known about fathers' role in supporting the social development of children during early years.

In this study an attempt is made to contribute to cross-cultural research by examining cross-cultural similarities and differences in paternal beliefs and practices about disciplinary styles in Australia and India. This research will also emphasise the role of fathers in children's development. The aim of the research in this paper was to examine : Are there cultural similarities and differences in :

1. paternal beliefs about whether children respond better to reason or to punishment and why the particular disciplinary style is more effective, and

2. the extent to which various disciplinary techniques used at home?

METHODOLOGY

The participants were fathers of four to six year old preschool children from Brisbane Australia and Hisar, India. From both countries fathers of 29 girls and 26 boys participated. The feasibility of the research necessitated non-probability sampling.

In the first phase, data were collected in Brisbane, Australia. A number of child care centres, kindergartens and preschools were approached for participation of the families involved with those centres. As Australia is a multicultural country having families from different origin places, fathers were invited to participate if they were Australians of long-term residence. Fathers of 55 children constituted the Australian sample.

In the second phase, data were collected in Hisar (India). Families were contacted through seven schools with lower and upper kindergarten classes. The educational level of Indian fathers was matched with those of Australian fathers. In the Indian sample, 55 fathers constituted the sample.

A higher proportion of fathers (58.2%), Australian and Indian, were university educated, Diploma holders/senior grade constituted 25.4% and high school 16.4% of the sample. Of the Australian fathers, 78.2% were working full time; and in India, all the fathers were working full time. In Australia, 51% children were first born; in India 54% children were first born.

The mean age of children in Australia was 57.4 months (SD = 5.40 months) and in India 63.3 months (SD = 7.64 months). The mean age of fathers in Australia was 37 years (SD = 6.31 years) and in India 34 years (SD = 4.10 years).

Measures

A questionnaire was used to gather information on family demographics and fathers' beliefs about their children's response to disciplinary techniques. Fathers 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 fathers who had volunteered to par-

ticipate 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. Malhotra and Randhawa (1983), in an Indian study, had suggested that a structured interview scheduled was more suitable than a self-administered questionnaire. It is important to note that the interviews actually consisted of writing the fathers' reports by posing the questions from the questionnaire to fathers 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. Paternal beliefs are described by percentages and χ^2 was used to see the significant cultural differences. Extent to which various disciplinary techniques used at home, were examined using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to see the effect of culture, gender of child and educational level of fathers. In the MANOVA, F statistics for Wilk's Lambda are presented.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the percentages of paternal beliefs about whether children respond better to reason or to punishment. The results indicate cultural similarities and differences. In comparison to Australian fathers (51%), a greater percentage of Indian fathers (73%) reported that children respond better to reason. A similar per-

Table 1: Paternal beliefs : Children respond better to reason or to punishment

Paternal beliefs	Why	Fathers	
		Australia n = 55 %	India n = 55 %
Reason	Make sense to	51	73
A combination of reason and punishment	Combination works better depending on situation.	23.5	23
Punishment	Punishment works better.	18.2	2
Deprivation of privileges	Works better than reason and punishment	7.3	2

$$\chi^2 = 32.30, df (3), p = .000$$

centage of fathers in both the settings believed children respond better to a combination of "reason and punishment". Although percentages were low, in contrast to Indian fathers, a percentage of Australian fathers believed children respond better to punishment (18.2%) and deprivation of privileges (7.3%).

Paternal beliefs about why particular disciplinary techniques works better are also presented in table 1. Fathers who believed that children respond better to reason more often reported that *it makes sense; this is the way to approach things and it lays the foundation for future behaviour; if explained child seems satisfied that you are fair; or child should know the reasons*. Fathers who believed that a combination of reason and punishment works better were more likely to say that *punishment when reason doesn't work; both are used only when appropriate; or punishment is not much use without reason*.

A proportion of Australian fathers 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; or punishment usually is a stronger method to ensure it is not repeated*. A few Australian fathers indicated depriving children of privileges works better than reason and punishment. These fathers 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*.

Chi-square was computed to examine the cultural differences in paternal 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 $\chi^2 (3, n = 110) = 32.30, ps = 0.00$.

Disciplinary Styles used at Home

A three-way MANOVA was computed using culture (Australian, India,) gender of child (boy, girl) and educational level of fathers (university, diploma/senior grade, high school) as independent variables and disciplinary styles

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) as dependent variables. This was followed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs and post-hoc Student Newman Keuls test (alpha set at 0.05).

Significant main effects resulted for culture $F(5, 90) = 7.34, p = .000$; and educational level of fathers, $F(10, 180) = 3.61, p = .02$. The main effect for the gender of child was not significant. Two way interactions for educational level of fathers by gender of child; culture by gender of child; and culture by educational level of fathers were no significant. Similarly three way interaction for culture by gender of child by educational level of fathers was not significant.

For the main effect of culture, significant univariate F-tests resulted for DCP and VREP, $F_s(1, 94) = 4.87$ and 28.16 respectively, $ps = .03$ and $.000$ respectively. As shown in table 2, Australian fathers were more likely to use verbal reprimand and deprivation of privileges than their Indian counterparts. Means and standard deviations are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations for disciplinary strategies (Cultural Differences)

Culture	n	MCU	VREP**	DCP*	UPP	IG
Australia	55	4.58 ±.71	3.95 ±.75	3.00 ±1.1	2.06 ±.73	2.11 ±.98
India	55	4.75 ±.35	2.95 ±.94	2.35 ±1.2	2.08 ±.87	1.88 ±1.04

Note : MCU : making child understand; VREP : verbal reprimanding; UPP : using physical punishment; DCP: depriving child of privileges; IG : ignoring child's behaviour.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Univariate F-tests for the main effect of fathers' education were significant for VREP, $F(2, 94) = 4.34, p = .03$; DCP, $F(2, 94) = 4.36, p = .04$; and UPP, $F(2, 94) = 6.36, p = .003$. Follow up Student Newman Keuls test revealed that, as presented in table 3, university educated fathers were less likely to use verbal reprimand, deprivation of privileges and physical punishment than high school educated fathers. Means and standard deviations are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations for disciplinary strategies (Effect of Parent Education)

Educational Parents	n	MCU	VREP*	DCP*	UPP*	IG
University	64	4.81 ±.70	3.17* ±.95	2.26* ±1.12	1.83* ±.68	1.98 ±.13
Diploma/ Senior Grade	27	4.69 ±.94	3.42 ±1.1	2.74 ±1.14	2.06 ±.99	2.18 ±1.03
High School	16	4.46 ±.52	3.75* ±.82	3.00* ±.90	2.33* ±.83	1.75 ±.86
Below						

Note: MCU: making child understand; VREP: verbal reprimanding; UPP: using physical punishment; DCP: depriving child of privileges; IG: ignoring child's behaviour. For VREP, UPP and DCP a < b, *p < .05

DISCUSSION

Results of the present study indicate cultural similarities and differences in paternal beliefs about discipline across two cultural groups. Compared to Australian fathers, more Indian fathers believed that children respond better to reason and believed this technique to be more effective as reasons make sense to children. These findings are consistent with previous research in India by Singh et al. (1987). These authors reported that Hindu fathers used inductive discipline to control their children. Although the religion of the parents was not examined in the present study, all of the families were Hindu. Roopnarine et al. (1989) also reported that fathers are the chief disciplinarians in India and through guidance encourage the growth of social competence. In both cultural groups, some of the fathers indicated that their children respond better to a combination of reason and punishment. According to Hoffman (1994), most parental inductions (reasons) also possess power-assertive qualities.

Taken together these two categories of paternal responses, results indicate that in both cultural groups parents believed children respond better to reason and a combination of "reason and punishment". These styles of discipline might be considered as inductive disciplinary styles. Literature indicates that parents strongly recognise the importance of reasoning (e.g., Bachtold, 1982; Najman et al., 1994; Roberts et al., 1985; Ross, 1984).

Compared to Indian fathers, more Australian fathers indicated that punishment works

better than reason. Further examination of data revealed that, of these fathers, 6 were fathers of sons. Additionally, Australian fathers were more likely to use verbal reprimand. Fathers belief about punishment might be related to aggressive or destructive behaviour of sons. Bronstein (1994) report that compared to daughters, fathers use physical control with sons due to aggressive behaviour of sons. The other explanation might be, as indicated by Kelley et al. (1992), parents may use physical punishment as a "behavioural practice" (p. 578) and there may be other factors contributing to this practice.

That more Australian fathers used deprivation of privileges might be because they believe it is a useful disciplinary technique under certain circumstances. Fathers 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 western culture. Power et al. (1992) in United States and Balda and Irving (in press) in Australia found that mothers were likely to control children's social behaviour with material consequences.

Education of fathers appeared to have an impact on the extent to which disciplinary styles were used at home. More educated fathers were less likely to use verbal reprimand, physical punishment and deprivation of privileges than their less educated counterparts. Although not significant, higher educated fathers were more likely to make children understand than less educated fathers. These results get support from the previous literature (e.g. Najman et al., 1994). In a recent study, Balda and Irving (in press) found that less educated mothers were more likely to use physical punishment than more educated mothers.

Few limitations in the present research are apparent. First, self-report measures of parental beliefs and practices were used. Questionnaires have been considered as valuable for obtaining parental beliefs and practices (Tauliatos et al., 1990). Holden and Edwards (1989) reported that parent questionnaires may be unreliable and inaccurate. Parents may not provide accurate information about their actual parenting practices. Observations of the

parenting practices would provide further insights into this area of research. Second, the sample was homogenous, the majority of fathers in both cultural groups were highly educated. This limits the generalisability of results to other groups within Australian and Indian society.

In conclusion, compared to Australian fathers, more Indian fathers believe that children respond better to reasoning. Some of the fathers in both cultural groups believe that children respond better to combination of reasoning and punishment. A few Australian fathers believe that deprivation of privileges and punishment is more effective. Australian fathers are more likely to use verbal reprimand and deprivation of privileges. Compared to less educated fathers, in both cultural groups, more educated fathers are less likely to use verbal reprimand, physical punishment and deprivation of privileges and more likely to make children understand (induction). Fathers use similar disciplinary techniques for 4 to 6 year old sons and daughters.

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