

Mothers Interaction with Children: A Study in Three Income Groups

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ABSTRACT A study was conducted in the year 2004 in city Hisar in the state of Haryana on a sample size of 90 mothers of 45 male and 45 female young children. Self-structured interview schedule was used to gather information on various interactional strategies adopted by the mothers. Responsivity, physical affection, explaining, praise/appreciation, instruction, criticizing are used similarly by the mothers of all strata of society. Involvement, observing, inquiry, suggestion, helping on demand, reward power, comply, encouraging and physical restraints are used more by the higher-income group mothers whereas neglect, inquiry, punishment, fear are more used by the mothers of lower-income group.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the child's development is the main responsibility of the mothers. She up brings the child into fully bloomed, mature person. Before the child enters into school she prepares the child to be creative, to be innovative, to think and to learn from the ups and down of the life. Though all the persons that come in contact with the child are significant but the role of mother is most important. The mother has to be playful, active, alert and sensitive while dealing with the child, especially during the pre-school years when child actively seeks grasp of knowledge, the mothers' active involvement can lay the foundation for intellectual development. Mothers interact with the child in various ways. In interaction various strategies are used. Strategies are conscious or unconscious behavioral activities that are used to enhance mental performance. Some activities may be effective others ineffective. An ideal situation fosters a stimulating and enriching learning environment. The quality of parent-child interaction determines the quality of child's development. Laosa (1977) empirically tested a causal model of family as facilitator in child's intellectual development. Bromwich and her colleagues (1978) specify parent-infant interaction by six level hierarchies. Baumrind (1967) empirically tested causal model of family interaction and child's personality development. Segal (1978) worked on effectiveness of communication strategies adopted by mother. Many researches have highlighted the role of various socio-economic variables in the

choice of interaction strategies. The income, the employment status are important in generating resources for the child. There are many other conditions which are associated with economic status like education, social interaction and media exposure. All these together may influence the choice of interactional strategies. The present study has been undertaken to find out the differences if any in the choice of interactional strategies as adopted by the mothers belonging to various strata of society. The strategies undertaken are divided in four categories i.e. relational strategies, thinking facilitating strategies, change affecting positive strategies and change affecting negative strategies.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on 90 mothers of 4-5 years old children selecting 30 from each of the three income groups viz low, middle and high during January to March 2004 with the help of interview schedule which contains four types of strategies i.e. relational strategies, thinking facilitating strategies, change affecting positive strategies, change affecting negative strategies. Each strategy contains three questions with three response categories-most of time, some time and never with the weightage 2, 1, 0 respectively. The highest possible score was 6 and lowest zero.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the mean scores of the respon-

dents of the each of the three income groups on all the strategies taken in the present investigation.

Relational Strategies: Relational strategies stress upon the relationship between the mother and the child in the form of responsivity, involvement, physical affection, observing or supervising from distance. In responsivity mothers give emotional and physical responses to children's various activities positively. In involvement mother gets physically involved in the activities being performed by the child. Many times mothers show their affection physically by patting, kissing or hugging. Sometime mothers observe and supervise the activities of the child from distance. Sexton (1972) highlighted that one of the most frequent worries of new parents is that they will spoil their children. The fact remains that no child is spoiled by love, by being given appropriate affection and attention as needed. The research suggests that the syndrome of spoiling, characterized by excessive demands, sulking, pouting, crying and/ or temper tantrums to get one's way occurs not as a result of lavish affection, but rather from a lack of emotional support and affection and a family environment that is authoritative or that fails to be demonstrative in its affectional interaction. Refuse/neglect/rejection are extreme type of negative behavior when mothers refuse to respond and interact with the child. They reject the child even when it asks for the help. Table shows that responsivity is more used in low income group whereas involvement, physical affection are more used in higher-income group. So is the case with observing/supervising. Refuse/neglect are least used in higher-income group. The middle-income group mothers have scored in between the scores of low and high income group mothers on all the five relational strategies. This shows that mothers of higher-income group who are more equipped with knowledge and resources use positive relational strategies more than the negative ones. The highest mean score on refuse/neglect or rejection as obtained by the mothers of lower-income group is the cause of great concern. So is the case with involvement strategy where the mean score is low.

Thinking Facilitating Strategies: thinking facilitating strategies stress upon mother's help in different ways for developing child's thinking process in the form of inquiry, propose alternatives/suggestions, explaining and helping on demand. In inquiry mother asks questions to

the child or makes an interrogative suggestion. In propose alternatives/ suggestion mothers propose different options or different ways of performing the tasks to their child. Some times mothers explain or demonstrate the activities to perform the task. Whenever child needs help, mothers provide help for accomplishing their task. Table 1 shows that inquiry, propose alternatives and explaining/demonstration are more used in higher-income group. Helping on demand is more used in middle-income group. This shows that lower income group mother have scored in between the scores of middle-income group and higher-income group mothers on all the four strategies.

Table 1: Mean scores on parental interactional strategies in three-income groups

S. Attributes No.	L.I.G. *N=30	M.I.G. *N=30	H.I.G. *N=30
<i>I. Relational Strategies</i>			
1. Responsivity	4.1	3.7	3.8
2. Involvement	2.9	3.0	4.4
3. Physical affection	4.5	4.2	4.8
4. Observing/ Supervising	3.8	4.9	5.0
5. Refuse/neglect/rejection	3.1	2.1	1.5
<i>II. Thinking Facilitating Strategies</i>			
1. Inquiry	4.1	2.5	4.5
2. Propose alternatives/ suggestions	3.5	2.9	4.8
3. Elaboration/explaining/ demonstration/modeling	3.2	3.6	3.8
4. Helping on demand	3.9	4.1	2.9
<i>III. Change Affecting Strategies (Positive)</i>			
1. Reward power	3.4	4.2	4.9
2. Comply/agree	3.8	3.8	4.0
3. Encouraging	5.3	5.3	5.5
4. Praise/appreciation	4.2	4.9	5.2
5. Instruction	3.7	3.1	3.4
<i>IV. Change Affecting Strategies (Negative)</i>			
1. Criticizing	2.6	3.3	2.5
2. Physical punishment	3.0	3.5	2.7
3. Threatening/ fear	3.7	3.2	1.7
4. Physical restraints	1.5	1.9	2.4

*L.I.G= Lower Income Group

*M.I.G= Middle Income Group

*H.I.G= Higher-Income Group

Change Affecting Positive Strategies: These strategies used in order to effect the change, modification or prevention of undesirable child's behavior. These are positive love oriented towards the child like using reward power, comply/ agree, encouraging, praise/appreciation and instruction. In reward power mothers give various rewardable things for showing good behavior like eatable things, coins, outing etc. In comply/agree

child presents the demands to their parents and parents agree to it. Encouraging to child is the best method to induce positive behavior in children. Some times parents praise/appreciate the child's work to encourage them. Instruction strategy refers to parents' use of direct instruction to ask the child to do something. Table shows that four strategies are more used in higher-income group except instruction strategies. The mean score on comply/agree is similar in lower-income group as well as in middle-income group. Same is the case with encouraging strategy. Instruction is more used in lower-income groups than others.

Change Affecting Negative Strategies: There are four types of negative strategies which are power assertive in nature i.e. criticizing, physical punishment, threatening/fear and physical restraints. In physical punishment parents impose restriction on their child's activities and award some sort of punishment to change their behavior. When mothers speak to child mother's voice conveys threats and fear feelings. In physical restraints parents give psychological pressure to their child for showing positive behavior. Results show that criticizing, physical punishment and physical restraints are more used in middle-income group; threatening/fear is more used in lower-group. Excepting threatening all other negative strategies are more used by middle-income group mothers, probably who are working under time pressure. Hence they use quick and short-cut methods. Clarke-Stewart (1977) suggest that the child's most valuable intellectual experiences during early childhood occur in interaction with another person who explains, teaches, reasons with, helps, entertains, converse with, praises, shares and expands the child's activities. These kinds of maternal behavior as well as maternal warmth seem to be more beneficial for intellectual development than are child-rearing practices characterized by strict control, coaxing, commands threats and punishment.

From the rank order of strategies as adopted by the mothers of three income groups separately, it is evident that mothers of high and middle income groups use the encouraging, appreciation, observing and reward power more whereas the criticizing, physical restraints, threatening and neglect rank low in order of preference of interactional strategies. The trend in use of strategies is different in low income group. Mothers of low income group prefer encouraging, physical affection, praise followed

Table 2: Comparative rank order of strategies adopted by mothers

S. No	Strategies	Rank order of		
		H.I.G	M.I.G	L.I.G
1.	Encouraging	1	1	1
2.	Praise/appreciation	2	2.5	3
3.	Observing/supervising	3	2.5	7.5
4.	Reward power	4	4.5	12
5.	Physical affection	5.5	4.5	2
6.	Propose alternatives	5.5	15	11
7.	Inquiry	7	16	4.5
8.	Involvement	8	14	16
9.	Comply/agree	9	7	7.5
10.	Responsivity	10.5	8	4.5
11.	Explaining/modeling	10.5	9	13
12.	Instruction	12	13	9
13.	Helping on demand	13	6	6
14.	Physical punishment	14	10	15
15.	Criticizing	15	11	17
16.	Physical restraints	16	18	18
17.	Threatening/fear	17	12	10
18.	Refuse/neglect/rejection	18	17	14

Table 3: Mean differences in interactional strategies in relation to three income groups

S. No.	Attributes	Lower Income Group	Middle Income Group	Higher Income Group
A. Relational Strategies				
1.	Responsivity	4.200 ^A	3.933 ^A	3.967 ^A
2.	Involvement	3.100 ^B	2.967 ^B	4.600 ^A
3.	Physical affection	4.667 ^A	4.300 ^A	4.833 ^A
4.	Observing/supervising	3.800 ^C	4.800 ^B	5.333 ^A
5.	Neglect/rejection	3.100 ^A	2.133 ^B	0.967 ^C
B. Thinking Facilitating Strategies				
1.	Inquiry	4.367 ^A	2.400 ^B	4.567 ^A
2.	Suggestions	3.600 ^B	3.033 ^B	5.800 ^A
3.	Explaining	3.767 ^A	3.800 ^A	3.967 ^A
4.	Helping on demand	3.533 ^B	3.767 ^A	4.167 ^A
C. Change Affecting Strategies (Positive)				
1.	Reward power	3.200 ^C	3.700 ^B	4.200 ^A
2.	Comply/agree	3.767 ^B	3.800 ^B	4.267 ^A
3.	Encouraging	5.433 ^B	5.700 ^B	6.067 ^A
4.	Praise/appreciation	4.733 ^A	5.00 ^A	5.067 ^A
5.	Instruction	1.233 ^A	1.800 ^A	1.467 ^A
D. Change Affecting Strategies (Negative)				
1.	Criticizing	2.733 ^A	2.967 ^A	2.567 ^A
2.	Physical punishment	3.233 ^A	3.700 ^A	2.567 ^B
3.	Threatening/fear	3.400 ^A	3.433 ^A	1.867 ^B
4.	Physical restraints	1.000 ^B	1.233 ^B	2.300 ^A

by inquiry and Responsivity more than others. The less preferred strategies are physical restraints, criticizing, involvement and physical punishment. Baker et al. (1994) analyzed that low-income parents reported doing more reading practice and homework (e.g., flashcards, letter-practice) with their kindergarten-age children than did middle-income parents; and middle-income parents reported only slightly more joint book

reading with their children than did low-income families. These middle-income parents did, however, report a good deal more play with print and more independent reading by children. The nature of what transpires during reading time appears to matter a good deal—perhaps more than the mere fact that parent-child reading occurs.

The differences in the mean scores of the three income groups as shown in table 3 have been compared for their significance by applying the Duncan's test which rests upon F-test for significance of differences in mean scores. Superscripts A, B, C are used to express the status of differences in the means.

The table shows that the mean scores on Responsivity strategy are statistically not significant as the values in the three income groups are superscript with A. this shows that all the three groups use almost similar amount of Responsivity. This trend was same in case of physical affection also. The involvement and observing are in favor of higher-income group; neglect/rejection in lower-income group which is significantly higher than middle-income group and higher-income group. Bomba et al. (1994) investigated the relationship between young children's temperament and maternal teaching techniques in mother-child dyads. Correlation were -0.55 to -0.60 for activities with mother's use of verbal cues, children's adaptability and mother's positive and negative verbal feedback and children's distractibility and mother's modeling.

In thinking facilitating strategies, the difference in the mean scores of the three income group on explaining strategy is statistically not significant. However suggestion and helping on demand is significantly higher in high income group from other income groups. In the positive change affecting strategies mean score of praise

and instruction are statistically not significant whereas encouraging, comply or agree, reward power are in favor of higher-income group. In the case of change affecting negative strategies the differences in the mean scores on criticizing is not statistically significant. Physical punishment and threatening/fear are in favor of low-income group and middle-income group whereas in physical restraints it is in favor of high-income group.

In general, responsivity, physical affection, explaining, praise/appreciation, instruction, criticizing are used similarly by the mothers of all strata of society. Involvement, observing, inquiry, suggestion, helping on demand, reward power, comply, encouraging and physical restraints are used more by the higher-income group mothers whereas neglect, inquiry, punishment, fear are more used by the mothers of low-income group.

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