

Factors of Child-rearing Practices: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT This article is an attempt to identify the different factors that determine the child-rearing practices of parents. Rather than a single broad factor, the authors try to view child-rearing as constituting of different factors that together determine how children are brought up by their parents. Qualitative techniques like introspection, observation, interviewing and meta analysis are done. The different factors that are identified include Acceptance, Punishment, Protectiveness, Responsibility, Responsiveness, Reward, Understanding, Non-critical, Permissiveness, Encouragement, Rapport, Emotional Stability, and Patience. This multi-factor approach to child-rearing would throw light upon the different aspects of parenting, and also help parents and prospective parents to concentrate on those aspects which need improvement on their part. It is also helpful for trainers and psychologists to impart training and knowledge to parents for improvement in their parenting skills.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this investigation is to identify and explain the different factors or variables that constitute child-rearing.

Child-rearing practices is a generalized term used to refer to characteristic ways of handling or dealing with one's children (Judy 2000). How parents bring up their children and how parental characteristics are infused into child personality are questions that continue to inspire research (Kail and Cavanaugh 2000). The goals, values, and life styles of parents have a great effect on the growing child. As the earliest and most durable source of socialization, a child's parents are the first people with whom he identifies, and they remain the strongest influence in his development. This overwhelming importance of parenting has led developmental psychologists to take an intense interest in parent-child interactions (Tilker 1975).

The research findings reviewed in the paper by O'Connor and Scott (2007) demonstrated that parenting and parenting intervention programmes are rightly seen as a public health matter. Improving the quality of parent-child relationship can be expected to have positive effects on the individual and family and on the society as a whole.

The study by Landry et al. (2011) reports on the relation of four patterns of responsive parenting across early childhood with children's rate of cognitive and social development through

8 years of age for a cohort of children born preterm and of very low birth weight and term. Consistent responsiveness across early childhood predicted faster rates of cognitive and social growth than did inconsistent or minimal responsiveness, particularly for preterm children. As parenting at 6 and 8 years did not alter this relation, results suggest that parenting across early childhood plays a unique role in children's development

One still hears occasionally what used to be a popular catch phrase: 'There are no problem children, only problem parents'. This statement refers, in part, to an explanation of why children fail to adapt to society's norms. Most parents make many complaints about their children and they often become worried and tensed about their child's incompetence and inabilities. These parents should realize that they are the people who can incorporate all the necessary abilities and competencies of life into their child. It is a fact that the experiences that a child gets from his parents equip him to excel in life. The way in which parents bring up their children surely influences their overall development. If children are to develop positive aspects of their personality, it is to be made sure that parents look into the different aspects of parenting (Durkin 1995).

When one concentrates on the component aspects of a particular variable, it makes it very easy to apply it and it may lead to a better outcome than when the same variable is studied in a broad way. When child-rearing is studied with

respect to its specific aspects, it becomes it very easy for the parents to analyze their behaviour with their children, and to concentrate on the areas which need improvement.

It is typically assumed in current conceptualizations and measures of parenting that the component dimensions are bipolar. Such models are simpler and more parsimonious. However, if constructs are actually multidimensional, then some of the richness and complexity of parenting or parenting types may emerge, which may not be captured by traditional conceptualizations and assessments (Skinner et al. 2005).

Most of the research on child-rearing focuses on broad aspects of parenting, as proposed by Baumrind (1967) and Hoffman (1994), which may not look into the different aspects of parenting. Concentrating on the different areas of parenting may provide an opportunity to the parents to do a detailed analysis of their parenting style, and may give good insight on how good a parent he or she is.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the present investigation is to identify the different areas or subvariables of child-rearing. The hypothesis of the study is formulated according to this objective and a qualitative analysis is done to find out the factors related to child - rearing.

METHOD

The different areas or subvariables of child-rearing are identified and selected through different qualitative methods. The methods used include introspective thought by the researchers, variety of discussions related to the topic, extensive review of related literature, and also referring to other psychological tests related to the variable. Thus, the factors were identified using four qualitative techniques: introspection, observation, interviewing, and meta analysis.

A. Meta Analysis: It is a research strategy, where instead of conducting new research with participants; the researchers examined the results of several previous studies (Borenstein et al. 2009). Here, meta analysis was done to combine the results of several earlier studies that address the specific issue of parenting. This involved the literature review related to the particular variable. Many theories and studies re-

lated to child-rearing were referred to and this gave a better idea regarding the different variables involved in child-rearing. Many psychological tests related to child-rearing were also referred, to extract out the different variables from them. The tests included the Home Environment Scale by Dr. Sarla Jawa, Scale for Multi-dimensional parenting by Dr. M.S. Chauhan, Family Relationship Inventory by Holahan and Moss, Parent-Child Relationship Scale by Uma Saxena and many others which had direct and indirect connection with the concerned variable.

B. Interviews: The interview method of research is a conversation with a purpose and is non-experimental in design (Kazdin 2000). Interviews and discussions were conducted, both with experts and common people regarding the topic, with special emphasis given to the subvariables of child-rearing. Experts in the field of psychology and development were interviewed and discussions were conducted, and this generated many theoretical views and ideas related to the variable. Discussions were also done with teenagers and their parents to get an idea regarding their view on child-rearing and its different dimensions.

C. Observation: In this method, the researchers observed the behavior under study in its natural setting, while attempting to avoid influencing or controlling it (Hockenbury and Hockenbury 1997). Observation and analysis of the interaction of the parents and children around were also done. Through these observations and analyses, a good and clear idea regarding child - rearing emerged.

D. Introspection: Introspection (or internal perception) is the self-examination of one's conscious thoughts and feelings (Baron 2001). In this study, the process of introspection was used exclusively for the purposeful and rational self-observation of one's mental state regarding the different variables of parenting. The investigators themselves are a daughter (first author) and a son (second author), and also are parents, as well as qualified psychologists and therefore a detailed self analysis and analysis of the interaction that they had with their parents were made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thirteen variables (factors) were identified as factors of child-rearing, which constituted

how parents bring up their children. Member checking and peer debriefing were done before finalizing the factors. Member checking took place by presenting the model that had emerged from the study to a few parents and children to ascertain whether the model reflected their experience. The concepts and categories emerging from the study and the final model were also presented to a group of child psychology students. Peer debriefing took place by discussing the interpretation of data and model development with a four-member research committee, each of whom had expertise in child psychology and research methods.

The factors include Acceptance, Punishment, Protectiveness, Responsibility, Responsiveness, Reward, Understanding, Non-critical, Permissiveness, Encouragement, Rapport, Emotional Stability, and Patience. An explanation of each of the factors is given below.

1. Acceptance: This refers to considering someone or something as satisfactory and welcoming. It can be viewed as the opposite of rejection, which indicates refusing to accept, use, or believe someone or something. Every human being wishes to be accepted by all others. No one wants to be rejected or does not even want to feel rejected. Parents are the people who are believed to accept their children, irrespective of the behaviour of their children. But, all children do not feel accepted to the same level. There are differences in the way children feel accepted or rejected, which is directly related to how parents behave towards them. This difference in parental acceptance is sure to affect the behaviour of the children.

2. Punishment: The term Punishment refers to that which causes someone who has done something wrong or committed an offense to suffer. Oxford Dictionary of Psychology (2005) defines Punishment as any stimulus that an organism seeks to avoid or escape. There are many situations when parents get irritated by what their children do. In such situations, most parents punish their children and this punishment can take many forms like scolding, beating, withdrawing positive things, and not giving attention. Parents also differ in the degree to which they punish their children. Even the same level of punishment may have different effects on different children. It is very important that parents perfectly understand their children and their situation, before giving them any sort of pun-

ishment. Sometimes a slight punishment may have a great effect on the children because the severity of punishment depends on how it is perceived by the children. This perception of the parents' behaviour is sure to affect the personality and behaviour pattern of children.

3. Protectiveness: This refers to wishing to keep someone or something safe from injury, damage, or loss. It is a behaviour which comes opposite to carelessness which can be defined as showing insufficient attention or concern, protection and provision of necessities and supervision. In a child's life, parents are the people who provide him with maximum protection. They are the people who have the greatest concern regarding their children. Even before birth, a child receives maximum attention from the parents and parents consider it as their duty to protect their children. It is expected that parents are always available whenever the child feels their need and supervision. This protective behaviour may not be present in all parents in the same level. Sometimes parents may not show this behaviour to the extent to which the child wants. Some parents may show over-protectiveness and some others may not show any concern, which may reach the level of carelessness. Whatever be the level and direction, it is sure to have an immense effect on the child.

4. Responsibility: This means having good judgment and the ability to act correctly and make decisions on your own. Responsibility is a quality that is expected in all individuals in the society. It can be instigated into a child through the way he is brought up. Some parents consciously try to imbibe this quality into their children. Some parents automatically or unknowingly impart responsibility into their children. Some others are not at all bothered. All these behaviour on the part of the parents are supposed to have a tremendous impact on the behaviour pattern of their children. The variable 'giving responsibility' looks into the degree to which parents try to give the child, situations to show and boost responsible behaviour.

5. Responsiveness: This refers to making a quick and positive response to someone or something. Children always want their parents to support them, react positively towards them, have pleasant feeling towards them, be friendly, loving and caring, and always be for them in whatever situation they are in. At times of trouble, children think of their parents immedi-

ately, because they know that they will be with them in all circumstances. But this is not the case with all children and all parents. Some parents because of many different reasons may not be available to their children when they are in need. This lack of responsiveness may have negative impact on their children. Children expect their parents to be for them always. When these expectations are thwarted, it may hurt them, and sometimes this negative situation may be so deep that the parents cannot even imagine the effect.

6. Reward: It is something given in exchange for good behaviour or good work. Reward is believed to strengthen the behaviour which follows it, as against punishment which is expected to weaken the behaviour that precedes it. When a child does something good, the child expects that others will react towards him in a good manner. The strength, frequency and time interval matters when a reward is given. Rewards need not always be materialistic. Sometimes a smile, kiss, or a hug can do magic, and sometimes a big gift may not make a slight difference in the child. How children perceive the rewarding behaviour is, of course, very important, as their expectations and hope may be sometimes very different from what they get. When what they expect and what they get are similar, any reward is priceless.

7. Understanding: Children always want their parents to be understanding. Understanding means having the ability to know how someone else is feeling or what their situation is, and forgiving them if they do something wrong. A relationship is understanding when it is positive, truthful, and sympathetic. Parents are considered to be the most important people in the life of a child. Parents are expected to know how their child is feeling. They are expected to know exactly what their child's situation is and are always ready to forgive when the child does something wrong. Parents are expected to show unconditional love towards their children and love them without expecting anything in return. Children should have a feeling that whatever be the situation, their parents will be there for their help. When children feel that there is no one to understand and help them, it may lead to a negative, dishonest, and unhappy parent-child relationship.

8. Non-critical: This means unwilling or being unable to criticize or find for faults. Most

people seem to be critical in their behaviour, that is, people are always experts in finding the faults in others. But, the fact is that all people want others to be non-critical. When it comes to parents, children never want them to find their faults; not even look out for their faults. But, this is not always the case. Parents criticize their children with the hope that it will be for the good of their children. Some children may take this in a positive sense, but some may feel that parents are trying to portray them in the wrong way in front of others. Creating a 'good for nothing' attitude in a child is the worst thing any parent can do to a child.

9. Control: It means to order, limit, instruct or rule something or someone's actions or behaviours. Permissiveness is a behaviour which is opposite to this. Most parents are, however, not sure as to the amount of control that is to be exerted on their children. Sometimes this confusion may lead the children to get an impression, which is not the same as what their parents intend to. No one likes others to control them. But, when it comes to parents, they are believed to have the right to control their children. Sometimes this controlling behaviour of their parents may go to such an extreme that it may be difficult for the child to tolerate. Each child is unique and children differ in the way they are affected by the control-permissiveness dimension of the behaviour of their parents.

10. Encouragement: It is something that should be given by the parents to their children to manifest desired behaviour. Parents have the duty to imbibe into the child certain qualities that are considered to be good. The words and behaviours of parents should give confidence to the child to manifest desired behaviour patterns. The confidence that the parents build up in their children will last through out their life and will pave way to success in whatever they do. But, sometimes, what is considered to be encouragement by the parents may be perceived as discouragement by the child. This may have a negative influence on the child, which no parent wants. Every parent wishes that their child is full of energy, confidence, and enthusiasm. They want their child to achieve success in whatever activity they involve in, and for this they should show such behaviour which will boost the confidence and energy in their child.

11. Rapport: This refers to a harmonious understanding or relationship. It means a good

understanding of someone and ability to communicate well with them. Most children want their parents to behave in a friendly manner towards them. Parents are considered to be the people with whom one can completely open up their thoughts and feelings. Whatever happens between parents and children, the harmonious relationship is always expected to exist. It is expected that parents be the best friends of their children. When children are in trouble, they always want to share their worries with someone trustworthy, and for them, parents are the best people. As the rapport between parents and children increases, the happiness also increases. However all parents do not maintain a good rapport with their children. Some parents are too busy to find time for their children, which will have a negative effect on the parent-child relationship.

12. Emotional Stability: This means emotionally and mentally balanced and consistent. There are immense circumstances where people lose their balance and get irritated. We have to overcome these variations and changes and should try to be in a balanced state. For a healthy personality we have to maintain emotional stability. Emotional instability on the part of the parents can have a very negative effect on their children. Children may be hesitant to interact with parents, who are suffering from sudden and extreme changes in their mental and emotional state. They may not interact openly with their parents, as they are confused about how their parents would react. A certainty regarding how their parents would react towards them would bring a sort of openness in the child's interaction with their parents.

13. Patience: This refers to the ability to bear or suffer something unpleasant or annoying. This quality of patience makes the parent-child relationship smoother and less problematic. A hostile environment will make situations worse, and hostility on the part of the parents may weaken parent-child relationship. If parents can tolerate the negative and stressful situations in their life, they can be a good model to their children. Children can learn from how their parents handle the difficult circumstances in their life, and this will strengthen the bond. Both patience and impatience on the part of parents are sure to influence the children.

Many earlier studies have brought out the importance of all the above factors in parent-

child interactions and in shaping the positive qualities in a child.

Hare et al. (2011), in their study on maternal acceptance and adolescents' emotional communication, have identified parental acceptance as a concurrent correlate of adolescents' behavioural disclosure and have suggested that this emotional disclosure is likely to be a protective factor against problem behaviours. They have also found evidence suggesting that when there was lack of parental acceptance, many adolescents might go to great lengths to avoid sharing information with parents.

Carson et al. (2000) pointed out that in the past, discipline was conceived of as a method for both punishing undesirable behaviour and preventing or deterring such behaviour in the future. Discipline is now thought more positively as providing needed structure and guidance for promoting a child with schemes similar to outcomes actually meted out by the world, contingent on a person's behaviour.

According to Reese and Roosa (1991), there is a correlation between the seriousness of people's life circumstances and their ability to adjust to them. Children fortunate enough to grow up in stable, affluent and supportive families, usually turn out fine. Those who were raised in impoverished, violent, emotionally abusive, or neglecting families were at significantly higher risk of developing serious emotional and behavioural problems.

Durkin (1995) in his book "Developmental Social Psychology" indicated that parents should provide clear articulation of reasons and responsibilities. He continues to say that this could promote awareness of the feelings of others, understanding of moral and social standards, and aspirations toward shared goals.

Hockenbury and Hockenbury (1997) urged parents to listen to their children. Let your children express their opinions and respect their preferences when it is reasonable to do so. In making rules and decisions, ask for their input and give it genuine consideration. Strive to be fair and flexible especially on issues that are less than earth shaking, like which clothes they wear, and so on. They also say that attention, hugs, and other demonstrations of physical affection coupled with a positive attitude toward your child, are some of the most important aspects of parenting, aspects that have enduring effects. One practical suggestion given by them to par-

ents is to work with their child's temperamental qualities. Be aware of your child's natural temperament and not against it.

Extreme control and guidance of the parents may make the children extremely dependent on others. When children are not forcefully controlled by their parents, children perceive their parents' requests as fair and reasonable, and they are more likely to comply with the requests. Such children are also more likely to internalize the reasons for behaving in a certain way and thus to achieve greater self-control (Hoffman 1994).

Durkin (1995) was of the opinion that the parents should model and facilitate modes of interaction which involve give-and-take and attempts at mutual comprehension. This could nurture skills in interpersonal relations, which could in turn contribute to socially sensitive interactions with peers, resulting in better adjusted and more popular children. He also pointed out that when the parent-child relationship is an emotionally secure one, the parent establishes a firm, stable milieu, within which the child receives the message that she or he is valued as a person, and has individual rights. This may well be favourable to the development of self-esteem and a sense of autonomy; which may foster the problem-solving skills of the children.

Hockenbury and Hockenbury (1997) suggested that parents should not expect perfection, and should learn to go with the flow. Accidents happen, and mistakes occur; be patient. Moments of conflict with children are a natural, inevitable, and healthy part of growing up. Look at them as part of the process by which a child achieves autonomy and a sense of self.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that all the thirteen variables described above together constitute how parents bring up their children. Children may also perceive the behaviour of their parents in terms of these variables. All the variables identified as subvariables of child - rearing can be viewed in the following way. Parents consider their children as satisfactory and welcoming, irrespective of the behaviour of their children. They punish their children when they do something wrong or commit a mistake. Parents keep their children safe from injury, damage, or loss. Parents help their children to have good judgment, and to develop the ability to act correctly,

and to take decisions on their own. Parents make a positive and quick reaction to their children. They give their children something in exchange of good behaviour.

Parents are expected to have the ability to know how their children are feeling and what their situation is. Parents also need not find faults in their children. The control or permissiveness exerted on the children is also important. Parents should also encourage their children to manifest desired behaviour. There should be a harmonious understanding between the parent, and the child. Parents are also expected to be emotionally and mentally balanced and consistent, and are expected to have the ability to bear something unpleasant and annoying. Parents should keep in mind all these relevant aspects, so that their children can perceive them as good parents, which may lead to a healthy parent-child relationship. This, in turn, may instill desirable qualities into the child, which may help him or her to attain success in his life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study suggests that parents must take into consideration, all the above mentioned factors, when it comes to parenting. An awareness of the different factors of child-rearing will provide parents with a better understanding of how children are to be reared. Concentrating on these specific aspects would definitely make them better parents, acceptable to their children. Counselors and trainers in the area of parenting can incorporate the results of the study as useful guidelines, and show the path to the parents regarding how to deal with their children.

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