Perception of Parents and Children on Parenting in Mala, Kerala, India

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Abstract

Parenting styles impact the character, fate, and future of children in the family. This study on parenting styles is a reflection of the perception and views of parents and how they parent their children. The study is explorative in design. Parents are an extremely powerful force in the lives of children. The study is descriptive in nature and uses the qualitative approach. The research studies parenting styles in Mala, Kerala and more specifically the views of parents and their children on the roles of parents. The data was collected directly from the parents and their children through an interview schedule. The researchers used an interview schedule to collect information on the bio-psycho-social, environmental factors that lead to the parenting styles of the subjects. The study revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between parental permissive behaviors and their age, between parental permissive behaviors and their education, and there was a positive and significant relationship between parental permissive behaviors and their religion.

Introduction

Parents are an extremely powerful force in the lives of children. Parenting styles impact the character, fate, and future of children in the family. Parenting styles vary regionally, nationally, and internationally. While parents play a substantial role in the development of their children, studies on the influence of parental style are rare in India and particularly so in Kerala. Parenting as a skill is not adequately researched and addressed in an appropriate way in Indian society, hence, the need for a study of this nature. In this chapter the researcher will discuss the family and its functions in society, parenting techniques, the importance of parenting to the family and society, the characteristics, roles and styles of parenting, parent-child relationships, and the need and importance of the present study.

Parenting has been a theme of academic interest for several decades and has attracted much attention in recent times. Child and family researchers have long recognized parenting as making a significant contribution to child development. Parenting is a foremost factor in the well being of children in families. Amongst those of us who talk about parenting, there is great diversity as to what 'parenting' really means. To some, it means controlling, disciplining, fulfillment of one's childhood desires through one's child/children, and to yet others, it means 'value formation' of children, formation of personalities. There are various parenting styles that have its impact on children's behaviour, attitude formation, and personality development. One should understand that parenting should be seen as an instrument, which can enhance a child's day-to-day activities thereby enriching his/her quality of life. In India, very few studies have been conducted on parenting styles and their benefits for children.

Research Methodology
Statement of the problem

Parenting is an art and a skill that helps strengthen and develop children's personalities. Parenting affects the life positions of children. Parenting means different things to different people. What then is parenting? Do children have different perceptions of parental roles from their parents? What is this difference that is causing problems for children? The fruits of parenting can be seen in terms of children's achievements. However, one can counter this assertion by stating that effective parenting is something more than just pushing children to excel in examinations. Effective parents may serve as role models for their children. The inspiring parent will sport a balanced attitude to life. Good parenting can bring forth a generation of mature adults.

With the increasing compulsion for dual incomes, both parents are forced to go out to work leaving the children to take care of themselves. This

has led to untold turmoil among children. Children are at risk at home and in the neighborhood in the absence of adult supervision ultimately leading to child abuse.

In the wake of major economic changes and the materialistic cum consumeristic society we live in today, family life is steep in luxurious living, T.V., films, and a make-believe world of 'mega' serials on local channels. Thus, such a lifestyle not only takes control of one's time, and mind, as well as shapes one's attitude to life.   Parents have a tough time grooming their children into good people. While such forces are at work, parents can be role models to children by not indulging in these redundant practices.

Significance of the Study

This study has both international and national significance as parenting roles have been shaped by the forces of social change leading to a degeneration of values in society. Sociology of family has become important in India owing to the increase in divorces, suicides, and crimes.   This reflects on the faulty upbringing of children. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore this field to gain a clearer picture of what parental role and parental styles means to both parents and children.

While parents have their own perceptions regarding parenting roles, children too have their own expectations of ideal parental roles. Parents who are busy working may hardly meet their children's real needs. This coupled with the fact that there still exists a lacuna in our understanding of the roles of parents is reason enough to initiate studies of this nature.   Therefore, it becomes relevant to analyze the following issues:

- the parenting styles from the parent's perspective
- what do children think about their parents' parenting style
- the correlation between the academic achievement and religious affiliations of parents and their parenting styles

Field of the Study

The researcher selected Carmel College, Mala, Kerala, India as the field of study. Undergraduate students and their parents were picked for the study. The parents and students represent parent and child populations.

Research Design

The present study is a descriptive study of the perceptions of parents and children on parental roles, skills, and styles. The relative novelty of this topic combined with the fact that no such study was conducted in this part of the country makes it inevitable that this research be descriptive in nature. Descriptive studies merely describe the qualitative data and therefore they do not test any hypothesis.

The Universe and the Sampling

The universe in this study was the students of Carmel College, Mala, Kerala, India, and their parents. A sample size of sixty-five respondents was drawn from the universe of 675 student households. All the student respondents are undergraduate students from both arts and science majors. The sampling technique used in this research was a simple random sampling method. This technique was used as the researcher wanted to gather information about the parenting patterns among the population through a descriptive design, which required much closer access to the population.

Sources of Data Collection

Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were used in this research. The primary sources were the responses from the respondents through the questionnaire method. The secondary sources of data comprise materials from books, journals, and the Internet on parenting theories, techniques, styles, and roles. The primary data was collected through the questionnaire. A questionnaire was prepared separately for parents and students. A questionnaire was preferred to other tools as majority of the respondents are either literate or studying in college.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the parenting styles of parents in the family.
2. To understand children's perspective of parenting styles.
3. To examine the correlation between the academic achievement and religious affiliations of parents and parenting styles.

Review of literature

While research has shown that there are numerous family variables that influence the career choices of young adults (i.e. socioeconomic status, education level of parents, parenting styles, interactions), it appears that family interactions play an important role in forming aspirations and decisions about careers. Interestingly, there has been a great deal of research focusing on family interactions and family characteristics on career development, yet there have been few studies that examine parental perceptions of their influence.

Measurement of parenting characteristics: Theoretical Framework

According to Freud (1936) parents were responsible for their child's developmental trajectory (McDermott, 2002). On the contrary, Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development emphasized the importance of internal biological and external societal factors rather than parental influence on a child's growth and development (McDermott, 2002). Thelen and Adolph (1992) describe Gesell's behavioral genetics theory, in which they endorsed

that a parent's central role is to help children realize their inherent genetic dispositions and to provide a conducive environment to stimulate growth (McDermott, 2002). Today, behavioral geneticists are beginning to recognize the importance of the environmental factor on child outcomes. Sutherland's (1983) study demonstrated that American parenting in the 1980s might be considered neglectful if they supported Gesell's theory of natural unfolding growth and development. One of the major findings of her study was the uncertainty of parents' perception of their children's needs and their roles in parenting. She found that Mexican American mothers were between Gesell's parenting model and the American parenting model, which placed more active roles for mothers in their children's development (Sutherland, 1983).

Piaget and Inhelder's (1969) research on "children's different stages of cognitive development" continue to enlighten theories of how parents can take advantage of knowledge on the differential stages of cognitive development of children to enhance their parenting styles (McDermott, 2002). Vygotsky (1978) stresses the influence of social interactions between children and their caregivers on a child's development (McDermott, 2002).   Bell (1968) also looks at the interaction processes between parents and children and uses Lewin's (1935) transactional theory to establish the relationship between individuals and their environment. His "child effects approach" suggests that parents and children constantly regulate each other's behavior through their interactions (McDermott, 2002).

Trait theories examines parents' personality or style rather than on a parent's ability to adjust to different children of different ages, genders, temperaments, and times (McDermott, 2002). Schaefer (1959) discussed the parenting continua of warmth and control (McDermott, 2002). Baumrind (1989; 1996) described three parenting styles as authoritarian, permissive, or authoritative, some of which included warmth and control (McDermott, 2002). While these approaches may help us understand more about parents and their parenting roles, there is a common view that parenting styles vary with different children (gender, age, and developmental stages) and at different times. Holden and Miller (1999) described the trait approach as the oldest and most prominent approach to the study of parents, but added that the trait approach is intended to reflect a general study of parenting.

Bell's child-effects perspective and the traits perspective are just parts of a larger transactional model (McDermott D. , 2002). As Holden and Miller (1999) note in describing Bell's important work, parenting should be thought of as a relational interaction rather than an individual difference paradigm and hence child-rearing will vary when interacting with different children in a family (McDermott, 2002). Mischel and Shoda (1995) also found that the person-situation interaction was a better measure to understand behavior than personality styles or traits (McDermott, 2002).

Related to the above parent-child interaction is attachment theory (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991) where research demonstrates that the attachment between a parent and child reflects a behavioral system promoting survival and proficient functioning (McDermott D. , 2002). These theorists suggest that caregivers need to establish a secure base for infants over the first year of life by being sensitive to the cues emitted by infants, addressing the infant's needs, and providing emotional regulation. Infants learn to trust that caregivers will take care of their needs. That trust develops into secure attachment facilitating the exploration of the environment and supporting the development of social and cognitive competence, establishing the important feelings of efficacy (McDermott D. , 2002). The next generation will be able to adapt to changing environments. Today's brain development research supports the need for understanding the crucial role of parents in the early years of a child's development.

Rogers (1963)'s humanistic and reflective theory encourages sensitive feedback and communication to older verbal children. He recommended parents use therapeutic skills of empathy to understand a child's needs and feelings (McDermott, 2002). Maslow's (1971) hierarchy of needs becomes useful while parenting. Minuchin (1985) added another dimension to understanding parent-child processes, which is the family systems theory. This theory stresses the importance of relationship amongst all members of the family. Researchers have found that fathers are more demanding of sons when wives are present than when they are absent (Buhrmester et al., 1992). Holden and Zambarano (1992) found that the stress of domestic violence results in more maternal aggression in children (McDermott, 2002). Hinde (1989) explored parents' adaptations to changing children and changing environments over time. While adapting takes skills it is more than merely a bag of skills; parenting becomes a dynamic process. Hinde's (1989) social relationships theory holds that ongoing human interactions forming interpersonal relationships represent the most important aspect of the environment for parenting (McDermott, 2002). These dynamic interactions between parents and children are embedded in long-term relationships; are affected by both preceding interactions and expectations about future ones.

Darling and Steinberg (1993) have explained parenting from a historical perspective (Stewart and Bond, 2002). One strategy used to describe parental characteristics has been to place them along single dimensions of parenting such as acceptance–rejection (Rohner, 1986; Stewart and Bond, 2002). Baumrind's (1967) typologies of parenting styles have served as the template for the design of many such recent studies (Stewart and Bond, 2002). Baumrind described the authoritative parenting style that incorporates high levels of three separate dimensions: warmth, involvement, and inductive discipline (McDermott, 2002).

Maccoby and Martin (1983) described the two essential components of parenting styles to be responsiveness and demandingness. Parental responsiveness also referred to as parental warmth or supportiveness refers to 'the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands' (Baumrind, 1991). Parenting demandingness also referred to as behavioral control refers to 'the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts, and willingness to confront the child who disobeys' (Baumrind, 1991, pp. 61-62).

Parenting style, as the young people in the family perceive it, is clearly associated with their academic success and with their chance of engaging in socially dangerous behaviors. There is devastating evidence that young people who see their parents as both kind (supportive/responsive) and firm (demanding) have more success socially and academically. Though children who are living with only one parent or who are poor do not succeed to the same degree as their counterparts with two parents or higher incomes, they still are positively impacted by an authoritative/democratic parenting style. Different studies have examined the association between parenting style and behavior from different perspectives. The general conclusion from all these studies is that when young people perceive that their parents are warm, responsive, and kind with high expectations, they tend to achieve great success in life.

Hill, (1997) describes how parenting differs based on social class among African American women. It was done on qualitative and quantitative questionnaire data from 243 middle-class African American women from working and middle-class backgrounds (Hill, 1997). Middle-class parents have high expectations of their children and more involvement in their education and also middle-class parents want their daughters to be successful in careers (Hill, 1997). Women from working-class families did receive support from their parents but not as much as did those from middle-class backgrounds (Hill, 1997).

From the above review of literature, it is evident that several researches on parenting skills have been conducted. It helped the researcher to widen the knowledge in the area. It also helped the researcher to identify the gap in the previous research.

B.   *Consequences for Children*

A review of literature reveals that parenting style has been found to predict child well being in the domains of social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behavior. Research based on parent interviews, child reports, and parent observations consistently

finds:

- Children and adolescents whose parents are authoritative rate themselves and are rated by objective measures as more socially and instrumentally competent than those whose parents are non-authoritative (Baumrind, 1991; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996).
- Children and adolescents whose parents are uninvolved perform most poorly in all domains.

In general, parental responsiveness predicts social competence and psychosocial functioning, while parental demandingness is associated with instrumental competence and behavioral control (i.e., academic performance and deviance).

- Children and adolescents from authoritarian families (high in demandingness, but low in responsiveness) tend to perform moderately well in school and be uninvolved in problem behavior, but they have poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression.
- Children and adolescents from indulgent homes (high in responsiveness, low in demandingness) are more likely to be involved in problem behavior and perform less well in school, but they have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression.

In reviewing the literature on parenting style, one is struck by the consistency with which authoritative upbringing is associated with both instrumental and social competence and lower levels of problem behavior in both boys and girls at all developmental stages. The benefits of authoritative parenting and the detrimental effects of uninvolved parenting are evident as early as the preschool years and continue throughout adolescence and into early adulthood. Although specific differences can be found in the competence evidenced by each group, the largest differences are found between children whose parents are unengaged and their peers with more involved parents. Differences between children from authoritative homes and their peers are equally consistent, but somewhat smaller (Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). Just as authoritative parents appear to be able to balance their conformity demands with their respect for their children's individuality, so children from authoritative homes appear to be able to balance the claims of external conformity and achievement demands with their need for individuation and autonomy.

C.   *Parent- Children Interactions*
Since the mid-fifties, research has suggested that family interaction is linked to occupational behavior. It is even believed that possibly the notion of

family interaction or functioning—incorporating parenting style (authoritarian or passive), level of support, guidance, and responsiveness—may have more influence on career development than demographics, including the educational aspirations of parents.

Parental support and encouragement are factors that have been found to influence their vocational outcome. For instance, the attitudes and behaviors, which children adopt toward work, may be the result of what parents say. Parents convey their influence on children through interactions such as conversations and through their reactions (both verbal and nonverbal). This then affects what children think, say, and perceive about various careers.

Often there is a contradiction between what parents say to young adults and what they ask of them. For instance, a parent may comment that it is acceptable to pursue a position with a nonprofit agency, but then counter such statements with comments about low pay and long hours. These types of references imply that it's more important to earn a high salary than to pursue a satisfying position. Parents may also become overly involved in career decisions because they want their children to be satisfied in a career that is popular in the Indian society. Children may begin to identify and accept what parents say to satisfy them. Therefore, they take their parents' comments as absolute and neglect to challenge them or to assess their validity. Although parenting styles may differ, parents tend to want to do what is best for their children, and children generally pay attention to what is said by their parents. Consequently, parenting styles play an important role in the future success of their children.

D.   *Summary of Previous Research*

While research has shown that there are numerous family variables that influence the career choices of young adults (i.e. socioeconomic status, education level of parents, parenting styles, interactions), it appears that family interactions play an important role in forming aspirations and decisions about careers. Interestingly, there has been a great deal of research focusing on family interactions and family characteristics on career development, yet there have been few studies that examine parental perceptions of their influence.

Main Findings
1. There was a positive and significant relationship between parental permissive behaviors and their age
2. There was a positive and significant relationship between parental permissive behaviors and their education
3. There was a positive and significant relationship between parental permissive behaviors and their religion

Suggestions and Recommendations

Further research must be conducted in the field to increase the scope of benefits for the students of Carmel College, Mala.

Training programs for parents during Parent Teacher Meetings will be helpful in imparting parenting skills required today.

Conclusion

This study brings out the perceptions of parents and children regarding parental roles. Parents were satisfied with their parental roles as they help children meet the challenges of the 21st Century by aiming high and achieving academic success.

The secondary sources of data were significant in the fact that much of the findings of this research confirm existing theory.

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