

CHILD REARING PRACTICES AND BEHAVIOUR DEVELOPMENT OF A GIRL CHILD

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Behavioural psychologists are firmly convinced that the personality of an individual is governed by early childhood experiences. This paper deals with development of two behaviours namely, aggression and dependency in girl children and relates these behaviours to the discriminating child rearing practices.

Two hundred and ninety pre-school age (3-6 years) children from 30 schools spread over the city of Hyderabad, the outskirts and a distant village in Andhra Pradesh were selected for the sample. The children were observed for the two behaviours and their parents were interviewed for the child rearing practices and the parental attitudes towards the observed children.

It was found that there was significant discrimination in feeding, weaning and toilet training practices, as well as in the parental attitudes towards the girl child. But the major discrimination was in the areas of age of sending to school, choice of school and future aspirations of the girl child. The girls were noted to be dependent while the boys were aggressive and dependent.

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In all patriarchal societies females whether kids, adolescents or adults are believed to be and treated as being inferior to males. Even parents discriminate between daughters and sons. The law makers and politicians perhaps unconsciously felt guilty, and as a compensation, declared a year and a decade of the girl child. Maybe it was the new awareness about the intrinsic issues of a girl child, which are gigantic and interwoven with the development of the entire society, that prompted them to do so. There is a constructive wave in the air to understand a girl child. As a consequence, the year of a girl child is now followed by a decade as declared by the SAARC countries.

How does a psychologist perceive a girl child? Exactly the same way as he/she would perceive a boy child. How does her physical motor/emotional, social/personal, intellectual and moral development proceed? What are the aspects and dimensions of the development of a girl child which are different from a boy child? In which personality components is a girl child superior, equal or inferior to a boy child? Which of these characteristics are different because she is born a girl and which of these are, because she is reared as a girl. These are some of the common questions discussed and researched by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and social scientists all over the world.

Development of Behaviour

Development of behaviour is normally a function of the interaction of biology (nature) or heredity and environment (nurture) and social forces. But there are behaviourists who advocate that the behaviour of a person (child) is wholly a function of the environment, and nurture, and the treatment and expectations given to a growing child. Thus a girl is groomed to be a female and, therefore, her behaviour is typed for the specific sex role. As against this, those who stress on heredity and nature argue that it is not just the external genitals which determine the behaviour of a child. There are sex appropriate hormones in the body which govern and direct the development of typical male or female characteristics. They

argue that it is the biological sex which determines the strength, the body type and the temperament. Thus boys are big, aggressive, dominating and physically strong and can take risks, while girls are small, dependent, submissive, weak and tend to avoid danger. Some psychologists believe that it is neither the heredity nor the environment, but the gender identity which has developed in a growing child which ultimately determines his/her maleness/femaleness.

There are a number of research studies which point out that boys and girls are different in their physical strength, abilities, interests, temperaments, attitudes and values. For example, Bee (1978); Park and Stabby (1983); Bhogle (1986, 1990); Eagly and Steffen (1986); Bandura (1986) and Perry, Perry and Weiss (1989) have reported that boys are more aggressive than girls. Beene (1980) found that females have a more positive self concept, but Bharathi (1984) reported that girls have a low self concept. Some interpret these differences as being due to differing grooming and socialization by the parents, the community, the schools, the peers and also other modern agents of socialization such as radio, television, films and advertisements.

Nature of Child Rearing Practices

The acquisition and modifications of children's personality and social behaviour are regulated by many factors, including the values of the social class or ethnic group to which they belong; rewards and punishments in the home and exposure to behaviour standards. Each culture and subculture has its own typical personality, a particular set of values, motives, ideals and ways of interacting with people. At birth, infants possess an enormously wide range of behaviour potential, yet normally children adopt only those personality characteristics and responses considered appropriate or accepted by their ethnic groups. This is mainly because of the specific *child rearing practices* of the family, inculcated in the child through rewards and punishments, peptalks, modelling, observations and identification. However, Stephanie (1987) in her book *Gender* discusses the biological factors that are considered more influential in shaping gender roles rather than cultural values learnt during socialization. Orkley (1981) also believes that gender differences are much more important than class differences. But, Mussen *et al.* (1979) point out that there is differential socialization of girls and boys with greater emphasis on achievement, competence, independence and assumption of responsibilities in sons and in interpersonal relations in daughters. Eccles (1985) reports that fathers encourage boys in mathematics and girls in interpersonal skills. Ruble (1984) also observed that boys are encouraged in risk taking, freedom, independence and are left unsupervised in younger ages, while girls are encouraged for cultural confirmity and dependency, Pandey (1987); Devi and Raju (1986) observed that family, society and culture play a major role in socialization and development of sex roles.

Non-family Influences

Peers often enforce society's sex role standards and there is marked reaction when children violate the sex typical patterns. Lamp *et al.*, (1980) found that peer punishment was an effective way to stop children's cross sex activities. Girls playing as firemen, mechanics or pilots and boys playing with dolls are not approved by their peers (Carter and McCloskey, 1983). Children's literature often reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. In comics, the games for boys are football and fishing. Men are the problem solvers and girls are dependents and victims (Braman 1977).

Walkerdine (1984) noted that in literature, a positive girl finds true happiness through self denial and by helping others, while stories in which girls take the initiative end in disaster. In television, boys are shown as aggressive assertive and tough and girls as attractive (Durkin and Akhter, 1983). These non-family influences are an aspect of child-rearing, but only to a certain extent, because of the great control held by parents.

The present research study aims:

- (1) To study the development of two behaviour-patterns—aggression and dependency in boys and girls—in their pre-school age.
- (2) To study the differential child rearing practices of male and female children in Indian society.

Method

Tools

Three questionnaires were used: (1) for the mother, enquiring into child-rearing practices adopted for the target child and (2) into maternal attitudes towards the child and (3) for the father, enquiring into paternal attitude towards the child. One observation check list for the child was also used.

Interview Schedule for the Mother

This questionnaire enquired about child-rearing practices such as: feeding, nature of feeding (breast, bottle), type of feeding (demand, schedule), weaning (age of weaning) and method of weaning (gradual or abrupt), introduction of other milk, attitudes of mother in the event of accident in toilet training (bed wetting), age of sending the child to school, choice of school (private or government), and future aspiration of the child among other relevant details.

Maternal Attitudes Scale

All the mothers were asked about their interaction with their child in 20 hypothetical situations. What would they do in the said situation. The verbatim replies were content analysed for four types of attitudes—acceptant, rejectant, dominant and permissive.

Paternal Attitude Scale

This scale is similar to that of the mother, but the situations of interaction are between a father and his child. The content analysis of the verbatim responses of the father to the twenty situations labelled him as acceptant, rejectant, dominant and permissive, or a combination of these attitudes.

The analysis for the first and second objective was by percentages and for the third, by the correlation method.

Child Behaviour Observation Check List

All the children were observed on eight situations—when they were at home, in school, when alone, with elders, peers, teachers, on the play ground and inside the classroom. Every thing that the child did, said or expressed was noted down. The frequency of four types of aggressive behaviours namely, direct physical aggression (DPA), direct verbal aggression (DVA), indirect verbal aggression (IVA), indirect non-verbal aggression (INVA) and four types of dependent behaviours namely, positive attention seeking (PAS), reassurance seeking (RS), physical contact seeking (PCS) and negative attention seeking (NAS) were used to find out the mean

and the standard deviation for the behaviours. The mean and standard deviations were used to develop an index and label the child as aggressive/non-aggressive, dependent/not dependent and so on.

Sample

The sample consisted of two hundred and ninety pre-school boys and girls from 30 schools located in three geographical areas: (1) urban metropolitan city, (2) semi-urban locations and (3) one village. The children represented three economic groups (rich, middle-class and poor), four age groups (three, four, five and six years), two caste groups (Hindu and backward Hindu) and two language groups (Marathi and Telugu).

Results

The following tables show the differences in child behaviour and the differential treatment given to boys and girls by parents.

Table 1A
CHILD BEHAVIOUR: AGGRESSION (IN PERCENTAGES)*

	<i>DPA</i>	<i>DVA</i>	<i>INA</i>	<i>IVA</i>
Boys	57.1	37.8	42.9	19.2
Girls	50.7	23.9	32.1	37.3

Table 1B
CHILD BEHAVIOUR: DEPENDENCY (IN PERCENTAGES)*

	<i>PAS</i>	<i>RS</i>	<i>PCS</i>	<i>NAS</i>
Boys	51.9	32.0	41.6	34.7
Girls	50.0	35.8	38.8	31.3

Table 1C
CHILD BEHAVIOUR IN HOME AND SCHOOL (IN PERCENTAGES)**

	<i>Aggression</i>		<i>Dependency</i>	
	<i>Home</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Home</i>	<i>School</i>
Boys	21.1	16.6	24.4	13.5
Girls	16.9	15.2	19.0	12.4

* The sum of percentages is more than 100 because the same child exhibited more than one form of aggression or dependency.

** The sum of percentages is less than 100 because some children did not exhibit either aggression or dependency to the extent to call them aggressive or dependent.

DPA = Direct Physical Aggression; DVA = Direct Verbal Aggression;
INA = Indirect Non-verbal Aggression; IVA = Indirect Verbal Aggression;
PAS = Positive Attention Seeking; RS = Reassurance Seeking;
PCA = Physical Contact Seeking; NAS = Negative Attention Seeking.

Tables 1A, 1B and 1C show that boys are more aggressive than girls in the three forms of aggression namely, direct physical, direct verbal and indirect non-verbal aggression. Girls exceed boys in indirect verbal form of aggression. Boys also exhibit relatively greater aggression as well as, dependency in the home, compared

to girls. This is due to the effect of differential child-rearing. Boys are given more attention in the home than girls, hence, they show the seeking behaviour or the dependent behaviour. The aggressiveness of boys is also tolerated in homes, hence, they show greater aggression, but aggression in girls is hardly permitted. In many homes fathers are more aggressive. Our culture expects aggression from males and assertiveness from fathers. The pre-school age child is at a stage when it identifies with the parent of the same sex. Thus paternal aggression is imitated by boys and maternal submissiveness by girls. School environment does not have such bias for boys, and we find that the school behaviour of boys and girls is similar. Teachers do not tolerate the aggression of boys in school. They also do not discriminate between boys and girls. In fact, sometimes, girls are at advantage. This is clear from Table 1C.

Child-Rearing Practices

Three usual practices of child-rearing namely, feeding, weaning and toilet training were studied for the total sample of 290 children. In addition, two practices namely, introduction of solid food and sending to school were investigated for a sample of 200 children from the main sample. Tables IIA, MB, IIC, IID and IIE show the results.

Table IIA
CHILD REARING PRACTICES: FEEDING (IN PERCENTAGES)

<i>N</i>	<i>Breast</i>	<i>Bottle</i>	<i>Breast and Bottle</i>	<i>Demand</i>	<i>Schedule</i>	<i>Demand and Schedule</i>
Boys N = 153	53.5(82)	5.2(8)	41.3(6)	70.0(107)	15.0(23)	15.0(23)
Girls N = 137	51.1(70)	12.4(17)	36.5(50)	50.0(68)	35.3(48)	14.7(21)
Value of r	NS	NS	NS	-.18**	NS	NS

Table MB
CHILD-REARING PRACTICES: WEANING (IN PERCENTAGES)

	<i>Early Weaning</i>	<i>Late Weaning</i>	<i>Abrupt Weaning</i>	<i>Gradual Weaning</i>
Boys N = 153	20.2(30)	79.8(121)	12.4(19)	87.6(134)
Girls N = 137	31.8(44)	68.2(93)	23.5(32)	76.5(105)
Value of r	NS	NS	-.14**	NS

Table IIC
**CHILD-REARING PRACTICES: REACTIONS TO BEDWETTING AND ACCIDENTS IN TOILET
BY MOTHERS (IN PERCENTAGES)**

	<i>Punitive Scolding</i>	<i>Indulgent</i>
Boys N = 153	69.0(105)	31.0(48)
Girls N = 137	37.3(52)	62.7(85)
Value of r	+ .13**	+ .18**

Note: Actual number of children in each category is given in brackets.

Table I1D
INTRODUCTION OF SOLID FOOD AND TOP MILK (IN PERCENTAGES)

	<i>Solid Food Rice and Other Food</i>	<i>Solid Food Farex and Other Supplements</i>		<i>Top Milk</i>	
	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Boys N = 100	Late	37.0	63.0	80.0	20.0
Girls N = 100	Early	19.0	81.0	40.0	60.0
X ² =			8.02**		33.0**

Table HE
SENDING TO SCHOOL (IN PERCENTAGES)

	<i>Early</i>	<i>Late</i>	<i>English Medium School</i>	<i>Any Nearby School</i>	<i>Expensive School</i>	<i>Simple School</i>
Boys N = 100	70.0	30.0	75.0	25.0	80.0	20.0
Girls N = 100	40.0	60.0	21	79	27	73
X ² =		18.18**		60.62**		56.44**

Tables IIA, IIB and IIC, again highlight that there is a difference in the rearing of boys and girls, by parents. There is a greater proportion of boys who were demand fed and who were weaned later than girls. Although the majority of mothers reported gradual weaning, the percentage of girls weaned abruptly is larger. Regarding parental punitiveness for bed wetting, the girl's wetting is tolerated but not that of boys. The cultural influence of grooming boys for harshness but not girls, is obvious from Table IIC.

All these differences when tested for significance by using contingency coefficient show that there is significant difference in demand feeding, abrupt weaning, and punitive or indulgent treatment for the two sexes.

Tables IID and HE show one more dimension of the differential treatment of sons and daughters. It is obvious that parents do not regard the daughters the same way as they regard their sons. A greater proportion of boys are given top milk, farex and other supplementary foods, while daughters are put on rice earlier than sons. The age of sending the child to school, choice of schools and willingness to send them to expensive school, clearly show the bias in favour of sons. Parents did not even find it wrong to have these differential attitudes. And in this regard, it was both parents who shared this opinion.

Parental Attitudes

The maternal and paternal attitudes expressed by the parents are given in Tables IIIA and IIIB

Table IIIA
MATERNAL ATTITUDES (IN PERCENTAGES)

	<i>Acceptant</i>	<i>Dominant</i>	<i>Permissive</i>	<i>Rejectant</i>	<i>Mixed</i>
Boys N = 153	32.0	12.8	1.3	12.1	41.8
Girls N = 137	20.7	20.1	11.8	5.2	36.2
	r bet D/P	- ' 20			

$X^2 = 18.94^{**}$ for four degrees of freedom.

Table IIIB
PATERNAL ATTITUDES (IN PERCENTAGES)

	<i>Acceptant</i>	<i>Dominant</i>	<i>Permissive</i>	<i>Mixed</i>
Boys N = 153	10.4	35.2	13.0	41.4
Girls N = 137	18.0	25.2	7.0	49.8
	r for A/D	-.191 *		

$X^2 = 6.24^{**}$ for three degrees of freedom.

Tables IIIA and IIIB reflect the parental discrimination shown through their attitudes towards sons and daughters. While a greater proportion of mothers have an acceptant attitude towards boys, the fathers show the reverse trend. Again, while greater proportion of mothers show a dominant attitude towards girls, the fathers show a dominant attitude more towards boys than girls. Mothers are also more permissive towards daughters and relatively more rejectant of the sons. Thus for permissiveness, both mothers and fathers show more preference for the same sex—girls. But the majority of parents have mixed attitudes towards their children, that is, they are acceptant and dominant or acceptant and permissive. This could be due to the variety of situations the parents were placed in for eliciting their attitudes. Thus, in parental attitudes, there are obvious differences towards sons and daughters, as expressed by the mothers and fathers. On the whole, mother's attitudes were not significantly different for sons or daughters, but fathers did favour girls.

Investigator's Observation

It must be borne in mind that none of the girl children in the sample were unwanted or abused. The mothers loved the children equally. The differences in certain dimensions of treatment were not with any negative feelings towards the daughters. But still, we notice the differences in the parental attitudes. This is because they genuinely believed that girls should not be treated the same way as boys, as they have to be trained for their difficult adult role as wife and mother.

The traditional beliefs that boys need to be cared and nurtured more than girls because they carry the family name; that one can stay with the son in old age but not with daughters; and that boys are after all 'yours', while the girls are only somebody's property and so on, were some common explanations given for the differential treatment.

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