

Family environment, socio-economic status and parenting styles



During childhood, the family environment “ constitutes the basic social ecology in which the child’s behavior is manifested, learned, encouraged or suppressed” (Dishion and Patterson 2006). Dishion, T. J., & Patterson, G. R. (2006).

In the 1960s, psychologist Diana Baumrind, using research methods such as naturalistic observation, parental interviews and other methods, identified four important dimensions of parenting: Disciplinary strategies, warmth and nurturance, communication styles and expectations of maturity and control. On the basis of these dimensions, Baumrind suggested that three basic parenting styles are generally displayed by most parents. (Baumrind, 1967). The three parenting styles are: Authoritarian Parenting, a style of parenting characterized by the establishment of strict rules, the failure to follow which usually results in punishment. The reasoning behind the rules is not explained to the child. These parents are highly demanding and unresponsive to their children. According to Baumrind, these parents “ are obedience and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation.” (1991); Authoritative Parenting, similar to authoritarian parenting, these parents establish strict rules and guidelines that the children are expected to follow. However, the difference is that the parenting is more democratic in nature in that these parents are more responsive to their children and allow for an open dialogue and space for questioning authority. Failure to meet expectations is treated in a nurturing and forgiving manner rather than punishing. Baumrind suggests that these parents “ monitor and impart clear standards for their children’s conduct. They are assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are

supportive, rather than punitive. They want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, self-regulated as well as cooperative” (1991); Permissive Parenting, wherein parents are least demanding of their children. They do not expect much from their children in terms of maturity and self-control and fail to discipline them. According to Baumrind, permissive parents are “ more responsive than they are demanding. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behaviour , allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation.” (1991).

There are two main dimensions of parenting that combine to form these parenting styles. These are parental demandingness (control) and parental responsiveness (warmth). Authoritative parenting is therefore a combination of high demandingness and high responsiveness, authoritarian parenting that of high demandingness and low responsiveness and permissive parenting that of low demandingness and high responsiveness.

Research over the years has proved that authoritative parenting style is more related to higher levels of adjustment (Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991), psychosocial maturity (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989), psychosocial competence (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991), self-esteem (Bartle, Anderson, & Sabatelli, 1989; Johnson, Shulman, & Collins, 1991), and academic success (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg et al., 1989; Cohen & Rice, 1997) than are other parenting styles. Authoritative parenting has also been associated with higher levels of optimism in late adolescence (as opposed to authoritarian parenting) (Debora R. Baldwin, Anne McIntyre, Elizabeth Hardaway, 2007); and adaptive adolescent achievement strategies “
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characterized by low levels of failure expectations, task-irrelevant behaviour and passivity, and the use of self-enhancing attributions.”(Kaisa Aunola, Hakan Stattin and Jari-Erik Nurmi, 2000).

Studies have also shown that authoritarian style of parenting may be linked to certain health issues such as obesity (Kyung E. Rhee, Julie C. Lumeng, Danielle P. Appugliese, Niko Kaciroti, & Robert H. Bradley, 2006) and permissive parenting (child’s perception) has also been related to child tobacco and alcohol use (Cohen D. A., Rice J., 1997). Bronte-Tinkew, J. and Moore, K. A. have shown that “ having a father with an authoritarian parenting style is associated with an increased risk of engaging in delinquent activity and substance use. (2004)

According to Max Weber, social classes are “ aggregates of individuals who have the same opportunities of acquiring the goods and the same exhibited standard of living.” A number of factors such as income, occupation, wealth, education, life-styles etc. decide the status of the individual. Depending on these factors, sociologists have divided the society into three classes: The Lower Class, the Middle Class and the Upper Class. Social class and socio-economic status (SES) are often taken to include not only levels of income and wealth but also the prestige of one’s occupation and amount of education one has attained (John E Farley, 1990). “ Socio-economic status is a composite measure that typically incorporates economic status, measured by income; social status, measured by education; and work status , measured by occupation” (Dutton & Levin, 1989, p. 30). As interrelated as these indicators are, they are not necessarily overlapping variables, which is why researchers tend to use one or another of them as a measure of SES. <https://assignbuster.com/family-environment-socio-economic-status-and-parenting-styles/>

When the relationship between SES and health risk behaviours was studied, it was found that the risk of dying was significantly high for the lowest-income and middle-income groups. (Paula M. Lantz, James S. House, James M. Lepkowski, David R. Williams, Richard P. Mero, Jieming Chen, 1998). SES is said to be a significant predictor of self-reported physical health. (James S. House, Ronald C. Kessler & A. Regula Herzog, 1990) and SES has also been related to adolescent health (E. Goodman, 1999). Adolescents of poor and low-income status have been found to be more likely than those of the higher income status to be in “ fair or poor (versus good or excellent) health, have limitations in their activities, and have had behavioral or emotional problems” (Newacheck & colleagues, 2003), reinforcing the results of earlier studies (Montgomery, Kiely, and Pappas 1996; Ford, Bearman, and Moody, 1999). Children of low SES are more likely to be born prematurely, at low birth weight, with birth defects, or disabilities. (Crooks 1995, Hawley & Disney 1992, US Dep. Health & Human services 2000). Class is a powerful variable in the social sciences since a number of other factors are affected by it, from life expectancy to life satisfaction. (Hess, Markson & Stein).

SES has been studied and proven to be correlative with social behaviours such as social deviance (Robert Merton, 1968), violent adolescent behaviour and delinquency (Karen Heimer, 1997) and criminality (Braithwaite, 1981; Elliot & Ageton, 1980; Thornbury & Farnworth, 1982). Associations between socio-economic status and aggressiveness in school students were also found by Australian youth studies (Demosthenous, Hellene T.; Bourhours, Thierry, Catherine M., 2002). Studies also show that low SES is related to both behaviour problems in childhood (Kahn RS, Wilson K, Wise PH, 2005)

and later schizophrenia (Werner S, Malaspina D, Rabinowitz J, 2007). It has been found that eating disorders are particularly prevalent among women in lower SES groups (Pate, Pumariega, Hester & Garner, 1992; Rosen et al., 1988; Root, 1990, Story et al., 1995). A study by Christopher G. Hudson, PhD, Salem State College in 2005 revealed that there is a negative correlation between SES and mental illness which is to say that “ the poorer one’s socio-economic conditions are, the higher one’s risk is for mental disability and psychiatric hospitalization.” This correlation held true regardless of the particular SES indicator or type of mental illness examined. Results of another study indicate that “ social selection may be more important for schizophrenia and that social causation may be more important for depression in women and for antisocial personality and substance use disorders in men.” (BP Dohrenwend, I Levav, PE Shrout, S Schwartz, G Naveh, BG Link, AE Skodol, and A Stueve, 1992). According to Bruce Eckland, children of higher economic class tend to be brighter, on average, than children of lower economic groups (65). Both prenatal stress and malnutrition impair development and are found much more frequently among lower socio-economic classes. (Health & Human Services 2000). A study by UC Berkeley graduate student Michael Kraus in 2009 suggested a link between socio-economic status and body language. He found that students of higher SES displayed more ‘ disengagement behaviours’ such as fiddling and doodling while those of lower SES displayed more ‘ engagement behaviours’ such as nodding and eyebrow raising.

SES does affect the thinking and behaviour of individuals. This fact forms the basis of a number of advertising strategies employed by various companies.

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For example, cigarette companies have targeted men, women and children of different socio-economic statuses differently, through their sophisticated advertising campaigns. (R. Bansal, S. John, P. M. Ling, 2005).

It is therefore safe to say that not only does SES relate to physical health differences but that it also affects cognitive processes and social behaviours. SES is associated with a wide variety of health, cognitive, and socio-emotional outcomes in children, with effects beginning prior to birth and continuing into adulthood.

It is thus clear from all of the research work mentioned above that both parenting styles and socio-economic status have significant effects on the development and behaviour of an individual. However, little research has been done on the relationship between the two factors themselves. As an important agent of socialization, the family and parents in particular, play a key role in the development of the child's self-concept and understanding of expected social roles. The parents themselves may be affected by a number of factors that contribute to the parenting styles and strategies adopted by them. Is socio-economic status one of these factors that affects parenting styles is the first question this study attempts to clarify. A study done by Littman, Moore & Pierce in the 1960s, concluded that there are no " general or profound differences in socialization practices as a function of social class." Since this study, conducted on a comparative basis in Chicago, Eugene and Newton in the United States, lacks research elsewhere to support its results and since it could be said that SES may possibly have different effects in an entirely different environment and culture like India,

the current study is highly relevant in order to either support the previous findings or to prove it invalid in the Indian context.

“ Parental Management: Mediator Of The Effect Of Socio-economic Status On Early Delinquency” was a study done by Robert E. Larzelere and Gerard Patterson in 1990 to test the hypothesis that the effect of socioeconomic status (SES) on delinquency in early adolescence would be mediated entirely by parental management skills. Parental education and occupation were taken as measures of Socio-economic status when the child was in fourth grade; parental management skills were studied during the sixth grade and the child’s delinquency in the seventh grade. This study found that, true to its hypothesis, there was no significant direct effect of socio-economic status on delinquency after controlling for parental management (parental monitoring and discipline). The researcher, in the current study, attempts to bring out the relationship between parenting and socio-economic status, which would then add to the results of such previous research as mentioned to say that the relationship that SES and parenting share independently might actually have a combined effect on delinquency; or that there is a transitional effect from one to another.

The hypothesis to be tested by this study is therefore, that parents of different socio-economic status apply different parenting styles.

Method

Participants

The participants were 60 students studying in class 10, in Hyderabad, in the age group of 14-15. 30 of these were from lower income families (<7, 000
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Rs. p. m.) and the rest from middle and higher income families (> 50, 000 Rs. p. m.). Each group of 30 consisted of 15 girls and 15 boys as the researcher was also interested in noting any differences in perceptions of parenting styles between the sexes. To choose the sample for the study, stratified sampling method was used. Participants of the lower SES group came from families whose monthly income did not exceed Rs. 7000; in which the parents' educational experience was high school or less; and whose work is mostly manual labour. Participants of the higher SES group came from families that were relatively well off, whose monthly income exceeded Rs 50, 000; and whose parents' educational experience ranged from at least a post graduation degree to a PhD for the fathers and from at least an undergraduate degree to a post graduate degree for the mothers. The professions of these parents included doctors, engineers, businessmen, chartered accountants etc.

Materials

Parental Authority Questionnaire: The PAQ is designed to measure parental authority, or disciplinary practices, from the point of view of the child (of any age). The PAQ has three subscales: permissive (P: items 1, 6, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24 and 28), authoritarian (A: items 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 16, 18, 25, 26 and 29), and authoritative/flexible (F: items 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 20, 22, 23, 27, and 30). Mother and father forms of the assessment are identical except for references to gender. Several studies were conducted to test the PAQ's reliability, internal consistency, content-related validity, criterion-related validity and discriminant-related validity. The results of these studies

showed the PAQ to have highly respectable measures of reliability and validity. (Buri, J. R., 1991)

Procedure

In the present study, the two Parental Authority Questionnaires (mother and father) were administered to the participants, in groups of 20-30. The participants circled the number on the 5 point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree) that best described how that statement applied to them and their mother/father, during their years of growing up at home.

Results

The two questionnaires of each participant were scored by adding up the likert values of all the questions pertaining to each of the three parenting styles: Permissive, Authoritarian and Authoritative (Democratic). First, the set of Permissive parenting scores were taken into consideration and a t test was run. The following results were obtained for Permissive parenting between the two income groups (Group1: Higher Income Group, Group2: Lower Income Group), of mothers and fathers respectively:

Table 1 showing the Mean, Standard Deviation, Standard Error of Mean and t ratio of Permissive parenting scores of mothers and fathers respectively as well as their 2-tail P value and its significance.

Mother Father

The following results were obtained on examining the Authoritative parenting scores.

Table 2 showing the Mean, Standard Deviation, Standard Error of Mean and t ratio of Authoritative parenting scores of mothers and fathers respectively as well as their 2-tail P value and its significance.

Mother Father

The following results were obtained on examining the Authoritarian parenting scores of both groups.

Table 3 showing the Mean, Standard Deviation, Standard Error of Mean and t ratio of Authoritarian parenting scores of mothers and fathers respectively as well as their 2-tail P value and its significance.

Mother Father

Discussion

A child's development into adulthood involves a number of processes and various stages, working independently and inter-dependently that determine the kind of individual and member of society the child grows into.

Psychologists like Erickson, Piaget, Kohlberg, Freud and others have over the ages theorized the stages of many such developmental processes as the processes of moral development, cognitive development, psycho-social development etc. Socialization is one such important process that influences the child's development through its various agents. The most important of these agents is the family and in particular, parents. Considering the

immense influence parents have in the psychological development of their child, great emphasis has been given to the methods and styles of parenting employed. People are becoming more aware of the consequences of their behaviour and attitudes toward their children on their development and their future. Parenting styles, as described by psychologist Diana Baumrind, have been found to have an effect on the child's self esteem (Bartle, Anderson and Sabatelli, 1989; Johnson, Shullman and Collins, 1991) and academic achievement (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts and Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg et al., 1989; Cohen & Rice. 1997) among other aspects of an individual's personality and abilities. The choices that parents make in the parenting of their children are influenced by their own personality, abilities, past experience etc. Are these parenting styles also influenced by the socio-economic status (SES) of the family? The current research found that there is a significant difference in the employment of certain parenting styles between families of a lower socio-economic background and those of a relatively higher socio-economic background. These results are based on a study of parenting styles of these two groups of socio-economic status, as perceived by the child.

The means drawn from the scores of each parenting style for the two groups showed that both the parent groups of the higher SES category and the mothers of the lower SES category, relatively more than the other two styles, employed the authoritative parenting characterized by an understanding and nurturing form of discipline. The fathers of lower SES group, however, drew the greatest mean in the authoritarian style. Fathers of such families are relatively more demanding of their children and usually set the rules and

policies of the family without much, if any consultation with any of its members. This find, along with previous research that proved that children of authoritarian fathers have an increased risk of engaging in delinquent activity and substance use (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2004), reiterates the importance of considering and altering parenting styles of lower SES fathers, for the betterment of individuals as well as society as a whole. Considering the parenting styles separately and comparing the mothers of the two groups and also the fathers of the two groups, the study drew some interesting results.

First taking into consideration permissive style of parenting, it was found that although the comparison of the fathers of the two groups showed no significant difference (P value = 0. 3612), there was a very significant difference in the mothers (P value = 0. 0081). The mothers of participants of lower SES were found to be relatively more permissive than the mothers of those of higher SES. Interaction with some of the mothers of the lower SES group lead the researcher to speculate that this difference may be due to the fact that in lower SES families, usually both parents have to work in order to make ends meet and, with the providing of even bare necessities for the family being a cause of stress, they hardly have time to, or even feel the need to pay much regard to their children's activities. This speculation, associated with earlier studies which have linked low socio economic status to truant behaviour among students (Attwood, Gaynor; Croll, Paul, 2006), may be an important find of interest to counselors and NGOs working with low SES families, who may want to consider counseling particularly the mothers of truant students. However, since the interaction with the mothers

was brief, it is suggested that further research into the reasons for this permissive behaviour is necessary to draw solid conclusions. It should also be noted that the mothers of low SES scored very low in authoritarian style and their authoritative and permissive scores were higher but not very different from each other. This goes to show that these mothers usually do not involve themselves in the disciplining of their children but when they do, they tend to be slightly more authoritative than permissive. It is only as compared to the higher SES group that they are significantly more permissive in parenting.

Considering Authoritative parenting style, results show that although among the mothers the difference is minimal (P value = 0.0909), the fathers of the two groups showed a significant difference (P value = 0.206), with those of higher SES being more significant than those of lower SES. This shows that fathers of higher SES encourage a more two-way relationship, where in the child is given the space to have opinions and question authority and is disciplined in a more supportive and understanding, rather than a punitive manner. It may be supposed that the reason for this difference is possibly due to the fact that fathers of higher SES are more educated and more aware of the consequences of their behaviour toward their children and realize the need to be more encouraging and understanding than strict. Once again, this supposition is only a suggestion for further study and not a conclusion of this research.

Finally, the authoritarian style did not yield any significant differences between the mothers of low and high SES groups, and the fathers of low and high SES groups. It may be noted that especially both the mother groups <https://assignbuster.com/family-environment-socio-economic-status-and-parenting-styles/>

scored significantly low in this style of parenting. Since it was found that fathers of low SES were more authoritarian in their parenting than permissive or democratic, it may be said that the fathers of high SES balance an authoritative and authoritarian style of parenting but are, however, more democratic overall; whereas the fathers of low SES are a lot more authoritarian than democratic.

With respect to the earlier mentioned study by Littman, Moore & Pierce in the 1960s which concluded that there are no “ general or profound differences in socialization practices as a function of social class.”, the present results may have proved the contrary, however, it is important to note that the results found are but partially significant. The significance of some of these results calls for a need to conduct further research in the area. Such research may prove to be great aid to counselors and organizations dedicated to developing the society through the betterment of its individuals, especially those of the lower socio-economic group. A number of programmes for educating under-privileged children have been and are being conducted in the country, which strive to encourage parents to allow their children to study, considering child-labour and child marriages are rampant despite governmental laws. However, in the light of research like the current study, one must also consider the need to counsel these parents regarding their behaviour with their children in general, everyday situations as the choices the parents make in their interaction with their children has been proven to affect the latter’s self-esteem (Bartle, Anderson and Sabatelli, 1989; Johnson, Shullman and Collins, 1991), optimism (Debora R. Baldwin, Anne McIntyre, Elizabeth Hardaway, 2007), academic achievement

(Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts and Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg et al., 1989; Cohen & Rice. 1997) and many other aspects, all of which contribute to the individual's personality and how he leads his life. It is after all as important to consider the psychological development of individuals of society as it is, their economic and social development.