

Does multiculturalism  
affect parental  
milestones  
expectations?



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## **Abstract**

Children's development is a dynamic process of active interactions with surrounding environment. Cultural variations in parenting values and child-rearing practices influence children's cognitive development. Understanding of these environmental socio-cultural variations can help in shaping child education services' accordingly. This study examined differences and similarities in time-tables between 40 Indian-Australian mothers and 40 Anglo-Australian mothers. Eighty mothers in total were asked to indicate the age at which they expected a child to attain competence in 43 tasks grouped in seven competency domains. Developmental milestone expectations questionnaire was used (based on Sissons Joshi & Maclean (1997)). The investigator of this study hypothesised that the Indian-Australian mothers' expectations of developmental milestones will be delayed in comparison to the Anglo-Australian mothers in all domains, except environmental independence.

Few differences were found between the two cultural groups. Indian-Australian mothers expected earlier competency in education, whereas, Anglo-Australian mothers expected earlier competency in self-care, compliance and emotional control. There were no statistically significant differences between the two cultural groups for peer interaction, communication and environmental independence. Findings of this research may suggest that the Indian-Australian mothers enrolled in the study were well acculturated and consequently exhibited parenting expectations resembling that of the Anglo-Australian mothers. More research is needed to

understand how acculturation may affect parental expectations in the Indian-Australian immigrant population within the multicultural society of Australia.

*Keywords:* multiculturalism, individualism, collectivism, acculturation

## Does Multiculturalism Affect Parental Milestones Expectations?

### Introduction

“ One cannot understand any thesis concerning life without considering the context within which it evolved. [...] The social and cultural contexts create in man the need to focus on certain factors of life. He studies the environment – and himself *in* the environment – to seize upon the essentials of his own existence” (Bühler & Allen, 1972, p. 5).

### Theories of cultural development

In his seminal socio-cultural theory, Lev Vygotsky emphasised cultural environment as the most influential in early cognitive development (Van der Veer, 1996). Vygotsky proposed a concept of a Zone of Proximal Development in which child’s cognitive skills can be promoted through participation of a skilled teacher. Vygotsky emphasised cultural variability and need for diversification of the developmental experiences for different cultural backgrounds (Peterson, 2013; Van der Veer, 1996).

In the same vein, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests in his ecological systems theory that a child’s development is a product of dynamic interactions between the innate qualities of a child and multiple systems of the ecological environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) compared the different

ecosystems surrounding a child to a set of Russian dolls. The smallest and most immediate environment called *Microsystem* may include home, school or peer group of the child. The remaining environmental systems in order of increasing number of interactions are: *Mesosystem* (the interactions between the different microsystems), *Exosystem* (e. g., the parents' workplaces, the neighbourhood, extended family members), *Macrosystem* (e. g., cultural values, political and economic systems), and *Chronosystem* (e. g., wars, economic crises, changes in family structure) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The concept of biology-culture dyad was further explored by Patricia M. Greenfield (2002) in her thesis on mutual complementary relationship between nature and nurture, or biology and culture. Based on the assumption that culture is an essential part of human development, Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni & Maynard (2003) proposed three tasks that need to be addressed throughout human development; these tasks include relationship formation (early childhood), knowledge acquisition (middle childhood), and the balance between autonomy and relatedness (adolescence). According to Greenfield et al. (2003) there are two ways of addressing these developmental tasks: independence and interdependence.

An independent pathway is associated with individual developmental goals and is predominantly present in Western culture. In contrast, an interdependent pathway occurs mostly in non-Western tradition-valued communities and prioritizes developmental goals shaped by social norms (Greenfield et al., 2003; Keller et al., 2006; Keller, Borke, Chaudhary, Lamm & Kleis, 2010).

The independent and interdependent pathways (Greenfield et al., 2003; Keller et al., 2006; Keller et al., 2010) correspond to more broadly used terms of individualistic and collectivistic cultures respectively (Wise & da Silva, 2007; Wise & Sanson, 2000; Rosenthal, 2000).

### Multiculturalism – individualism vs collectivism

In the modern multicultural societies, it becomes increasingly important to understand the differences between individualistic and collectivistic parental behaviours and child rearing practices. “ For example, the degree of individualism or collectivism is believed to affect a variety of psychological variables and to contribute to differences in maternal (and perhaps infant) behaviours and interactions ...” (Bornstein & Cote, 2001, p. 550). Various studies investigating maternal developmental expectations showed that children in individualistic cultures are expected to master verbal assertiveness and social aptitude with peers at an earlier age than in collectivistic cultures. Mothers with individualistic cultural background are more likely to see themselves as teachers of their offsprings before school (Goodnow, Cahmore, Cotton & Knight, 1984). On the other hand, self-control, emotional maturity, scholar achievements, politeness and obedience are the qualities highly valued in collectivistic cultures (Hess, Kashiwagi, Azuma, Price & Dickson, 1980; Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002).

Interestingly, not all collectivistic cultures have the same expectations in all domains of child development. In direct comparison between Indian and Japanese mothers, significant differences in maternal expectations were found despite of both cultures expressing collectivistic orientation (Sissons

Joshi & MacLean, 1997). Japanese mothers expected earlier competence in all of the studied developmental tasks with average age of 2. 55 in comparison to Indian mothers' expectations averaging at age 3. 26.

### Acculturation

The adaptation process between different cultures is known as acculturation (Bernstein et al., 2018). John W. Berry (1997) tried to understand the main forces shaping interaction between minority and mainstream ethnic groups in a multicultural society, and he came to a conclusion that acculturation is inevitable. Berry (1997) was particularly interested in psychological acculturation, which he divided into individual acculturation and group acculturation (i. e., at the society level). Acculturation can lead to a considerable stress among the immigrants, especially when the pre-immigration expectations are not met by the post-immigration real life experiences (Bhatthacharaya & Schoppelrey, 2004).

There are four basic acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalisation (Berry, 1997). Assimilation happens when non-dominant culture's individuals replace their own culture values with the dominant culture's norms. In contrast, separation happens when individuals reject norms of a dominant culture in favour of maintaining their own original cultural values. Integration is often understood as biculturalism. Individuals who adopt the dominant culture's norms in parallel to maintaining their own cultural values are perceived as integrated. Marginalization happens when individuals reject the dominant culture norms and do not follow their original cultural values. Berry (1997) advocated mutual accommodation between the

minority culture and the mainstream culture (i. e., integration) as a golden solution leading to reduction of economic and mental health costs on both sides. One has to remember though that successful integration can only happen when all the involved cultures exhibit positive and tolerant attitudes (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1997).

Acculturation attitudes of immigrants with the traditionally collectivistic backgrounds have been investigated in Western-culture countries, including Australia. Contrary to the common beliefs, acculturation process may not be enhanced by longer residency in a country. The major factor facilitating acculturation is the individuals' active involvement in the process, including language proficiency, employment and socialisation (Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). Furthermore, even second-generation immigrants may continue expressing parental attitudes of the original culture. Yaman, Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg and Linting (2010) compared parenting patterns between the second-generation Turkish immigrants and native Dutch mothers of 2-year-old children. The results of the study showed that Turkish immigrant mothers were more intrusive and authoritarian than Dutch mothers. Additionally, Turkish mothers were less supportive and showed less maternal sensitivity than Dutch mothers, which is in keeping with the native Turkish parental behaviours (Yaman et al., 2010). In contrast, high acculturation, or established biculturalism, may enhance socio-cultural flexibility and help parents to develop perspectivistic attitudes to child-rearing (Gutierrez & Sameroff, 1990). Parental high acculturation (integration) plays especially important role in maintaining continuity between home care and out-of-home care fostering healthy cognitive

development for the children (Wise & da Silva, 2007; Wise & Sanson, 2000; Rosenthal, 2000).

### Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to compare developmental expectations (i. e., the ages at which children are expected to gain specific developmental skills) in Anglo-Australian mothers and Indian-Australian mothers. Based on previous research on Indian-Australian mothers (Sissons Joshi & MacLean, 1997), the investigator of this study hypothesised that the Indian-Australian mothers' expectations of developmental milestones will be delayed in comparison to the Anglo-Australian mothers in all domains, except environmental independence.

### Method

#### Participants

Eighty mothers who currently had a child less than 10 years old participated in the study: 40 Anglo-Australian mothers and 40 Indian-Australian mothers. Mothers' age ranged from 22 years to 48 years. All Anglo-Australian mothers were born in Australia. The Indian-Australian mothers were recruited through community groups and organizations.

#### Materials

Sissons Joshi & Maclean's (1997) Developmental milestone expectations questionnaire containing 43 items grouped in seven competency domains.



## Procedure

The developmental milestone expectation questionnaire, as specified in Appendix A, was used to collect the data (based on Sissons Joshi & Maclean, 1997). Questionnaire was translated and back translated into Punjabi by Punjabi-English bilingual psychologists. Questionnaire was designed to assess mothers' developmental timetables (expectations regarding children's ages of skills' achievement) in seven competency domains: education, self-care, compliance, peer interaction, communication, emotional control, and environmental independence. The list comprised of 43 items in total. Mothers in both cultural groups were instructed to indicate what age they believed a child should be able to achieve competence in each of the listed items.

## Results

The participants' responses to the questionnaire were compared using a series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs). Mean scores for items and competencies are displayed in Table 1. Inspection of the results presented in Table 1 suggests that Anglo-Australian mothers expected earlier competency in self-care, compliance and emotional control, whereas, Indian-Australian mothers expected earlier competency in education domain. There were no statistically significant differences between Anglo-Australian mothers and Indian-Australian mothers for peer interaction, communication and environmental independence.

Table 1. *Maternal mean ages expectations across the seven competency domains – comparison between the two cultural groups.*

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Domain competencies	Anglo-Australian mothers	Indian-Australian mothers
Education	4. 85	3. 79
Self-care	4. 60	5. 76
Compliance	4. 88	5. 55
Peer interaction	4. 92	5. 00
Communication	4. 86	4. 98
Emotional Control	5. 72	6. 56
Environmental Independence	8. 30	8. 58

## Discussion

This study compared Anglo-Australian and Indian-Australian mothers' developmental expectations for the seven competency domains (43 items in total). The investigator hypothesised that Indian-Australian mothers will be later in their expectations for all domains except environmental independence. The results of this study did not confirm this hypothesis. The findings showed that Indian-Australian mothers were later in three domains only: self-care, compliance and emotional control. The study found that Indian-Australian mothers expected their children to attain competency in education domain earlier than Anglo-Australian mothers. There were no

statistically significant differences between the two cultural groups' expectations regarding peer-interaction, communication and environmental independence. These findings are different to the previously presented results of a similar research comparing Indian, Japanese and English mothers' developmental expectations in their home countries (Sissons Joshi & MacLean, 1997). Across the competencies, Indian mothers' expectations were the latest, except environmental independence, where they were later than Japanese mothers' but earlier than English mothers' expectations.

Asian Indian culture is perceived as interdependent or collectivistic, which means that the community values are praised higher than the individualistic goals (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002). Traditionally, Asian Indians live in patriarchal families with great emphasis on family relationships and scholarly achievement. Asian Indians tend to exercise authoritarian parenting expecting the children to be obedient and respectful to elders (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002). In contrast, Australian people are mostly representing an independent or individualistic culture with an emphasis on individual achievements and competitiveness (Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). In Australia an authoritative parenting style, using inductive reasoning, prevails. The Australian children are given a lot of autonomy and are expected to ask questions and be proactive in peer interactions. Findings of this research may suggest that the Indian-Australian mothers enrolled in the study were well acculturated and consequently exhibited parenting attitudes resembling that of the Anglo-Australian mothers.

Despite of extensive research on multiculturalism in Australia, there has been paucity of studies on the Indian-Australian immigration in the context <https://assignbuster.com/does-multiculturalism-affect-parental-milestones-expectations/>

of parenting and acculturation. The investigator hopes that this study will add to greater understanding of differences and similarities in childrearing perspectives in the multicultural Australian population.

The study has several limitations. First, no information on maternal socio-economic status is available. Second, the sample population was small and might not be representative. Third, there is no information on how many years the Indian-Australian mothers had been residing in Australia at the time of the study.

Matching the participants for socio-economic status and length of residency in Australia as well as recruiting larger number of participants should be considered in future research.

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## Appendix A

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES EXPECTATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT CHILDREN'S ABILITIES(based on Sissons Joshi & MacLean, 1997)Background Information of Respondent(person who completes the questionnaire)

Gender:      Female              Male

Age:

Birth place:

First language spoken: INSTRUCTIONS: Please write what age you believe a child should be able to achieve the following: (e. g. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, > 12 years)Education1. Count to ten

2. Write alphabet

Self-care

3. Eat without help

4. Wash hands before meals

5. Use toilet without help

6. Dress alone

7. Brush teeth properly

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8. Bathe alone

Compliance

9. Come or answer when called

10. Stop misbehaving when told

11. Not do things forbidden by parents

12. Do something immediately when told

13. Give up TV when asked to do something for

mother

14. Keep feet off furniture

15. Give full attention to adults when they are

speaking

16. Answer phone

properly

17. Be polite to visiting adults

18. Not interrupt adults when talking

19. Show interest in wellbeing of relatives

Peer interaction

20. Allow others to play with his/her toys

21. Wait for turn when playing

22. Be sympathetic to feelings of other children

23. Take leadership role when playing

24. Get own way by persuading others

25. Resolve quarrels without fighting

26. Resolve quarrels without adult help

27. Answer a question clearly

28. Ask for explanation when in doubt

29. Explain why he or she feels angry

30. When asked give own opinions



31. Phone by him/herself

Emotional control

32. Not bite or throw something in frustration

33. Control anger by self

34. Not cry easily

35. Not go on and on about wanting expensive toys

36. Stand disappointment without crying

37. Not laugh at other child's misfortune

38. Not show disappointment with gift

39. Hide being upset at being teased by children

Environmental independence  
40. Play in street without adult present

41. Go to school unaccompanied by adult

42. Stay home alone for 1-2 hours

43. Buy things on his/her own

Thank you very much!