

Psychology essays - temperament behaviour inherited



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Temperament Behaviour Inherited

Does the evidence support the claim that children's Temperament influences their susceptibility to environmental adversities?

What is Temperament?

There is not a single definition of temperament and there are many psychometric problems with the available temperament instruments.

Temperament is about individual differences. It is very difficult and fuzzy concept. There is very little agreement on the stability of temperament.

Temperament is composed of the traits, with which a person is born, which are genetic in nature. It differs from personality, which is a combination of person's temperament and life experiences.

Temperament is " the stable individual differences in quality and intensity of emotional reaction" and is present at birth (Berk, 1998).

Historical background:

Temperament has a long history. It arose in the ancient world in the time of Hippocrates. It was then based on the predominance of inner body-processes that were seen as typical of certain outward dispositions. From 1920 to 1950 many theorists observed individual differences in children but no valid studies were reported on these individual differences. In early 1950s many researchers used the term to identify biological reasons of individual differences in styles of behaviour.

Behaviour-Genetic Approach to Temperament:

This is growing evidence for temperament that some aspects of behaviour are more influenced by inherited differences (that are strongly genetic in <https://assignbuster.com/psychology-essays-temperament-behaviour-inherited/>

origin) than others. Gordon Allport was greatly influenced by Freud. Allport focused on the study of personal traits. He later changed the term personal traits to personal dispositions to emphasize the importance of unique, individual characteristics. Allport (1961) reported that temperament has an inherited biological basis and infants interact and react to the environment and experiences in different ways are reflective of their temperament, or behavioural style. (p. 34)

Eysenck's theory of temperament refers to biological and inborn personality traits. According to Eysenck's (1947, p. 21), " personality is the more or less stable and enduring organisation of a person's character, temperament, intellect, and physique, which determines his adjustment to the environment". Temperament refers to emotional reactivity. Nowadays the word temperament is used very commonly.

Buss and Plomin (1975) developed four temperaments in their initial theory of temperament: emotionality, activity, sociability, and impulsivity (EASI). Temperament has biological basis that appears early in life and is stable across time (Buss & Plomin, 1984).

Buss & Plomin (1984) revised their theory by dropping impulsivity as a temperamental trait due to the lack of evidence supporting its heritability.

" Emotionality is defined as primordial distress, which is assumed to differentiate into fear and anger during the first six months of life. Activity is defined as the sheer expenditure of physical energy. Sociability is defined as a preference for being with others rather than being alone" (Geldolph, et al, 1989, P. 49).

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Many researchers accept that temperament refers to individual differences, has biological roots (Goldsmith et al., 1987). Even though they agreed that temperament can be stable over time.

McCall (1984) defined temperament as “biologically based individual differences in reactions to the world”. He also described further that these reactions are relatively stable over time and it is not personality but is one of the bases of later personality traits. Personality characteristics are based on traits and behaviors which are normally acquired after infancy. Some of the personality characteristics are not influenced by the biological factors. Temperament traits are not completely inherited. The key aspects of people’s personalities are habits, goals, and self-perceptions which are not considered as temperament traits.

The New York Longitudinal Study Approach:

Temperament refers to how a child reacts to a situation. (Thomas & Chess 1977). In their clinical work they identified “correlations between environmental influences, such as parental attitudes and practices and the child’s psychological development” (Thomas and Chess 1977, p. 4). They conducted The New York Longitudinal Study (NYLS) and defined nine temperamental characteristics which are inborn and influence by environmental through out life. These NYLS temperament characteristics are assessed by looking at the behavioural style in environment. The nine characteristics are:

- Activity level: refers to the amount of physical energy in the child.

- Rhythmicity: refers to the level of predictability in a child's biological functions such as waking, becoming tired, hunger and bowel movements.
- Approach/Withdrawal: refers to how the child responds to new people or environments either positive or negative.
- Adaptability: refers to the ease of changing behaviour in a socially desirable or initial reaction.
- Intensity: refers to energy level of a positive or negative response.
- Threshold of responsiveness: refers to child's intensity level of sensory stimulation.
- Mood: refers to the quality of emotional expression, happy or unhappy.
- Distractibility: refers to the child's tendency to be sidetracked by other things going on around them.
- Persistence: the extent of continuation of behaviour with or without interruption

Thomas and Chess (1977) identified three types of children based on nine dimensions of response. The three types of children are:

- The Difficult Child (10% of children)
- The Easy Child (40% of children)
- Slow to Warm up Child (5-15% of children)

Thomas and Chess (1977) showed that Easy child easily adjusts to new experiences, has positive mood, emotions and normal eating and sleeping

patterns. Difficult child is very emotional, irritable and fussy, and cry a lot. Slow-to-warm-up child has a low activity level, and tends to withdraw from new situations and people, slow to adapt to new experiences.

35% children are not categorised in any one of these three groups. These individual children show a wide range of varying and different combinations of these temperamental dimensions. One dimension may be very influential in a particular child-environment interaction but not especially important at a later age.

Thomas and Chess (1977) measured temperament on the basis of parents' judgments that, s why they were criticized by many psychologists. We need much clear definitions of their introduced dimensions. These dimensions have no strong evidence. And the method they used is informal, no objective method is used. This is not very impressive study because no statistics is involved.

Environmental Approach to Temperament:

Thomas and Chess emphasized that parent's interaction play a vital role in children's temperamental traits for producing children's positive or negative adjustment in the society. Thomas and Chess (1977) described the concept of " Goodness of Fit". This is coordination of the environment, expectations and demands with the child's temperament, ability and other characteristics. After that a positive development is possible. While " Poorness of fit" puts children at risk for developing behavioural problems.

Characteristics of temperament are measured in different ways. Parents and teachers are interviewed about children's behavior at home, and at school

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respectively. Parent and teacher reports of children's behavior may be biased. So, scientists also use behavioural and observational methods to assess children's temperament.

It is important to note that Thomas and Chess's studies in the 1960s and 1970s were based on Western society. Culture also plays an important role between the child's temperament and his environment. As there is some evidence of temperamental differences between different cultures (Lewis, Ramsey and Kawakami 1993).

There is some evidence that the child's temperament fit well with parents' socialization methods. Kochanska (1998) supported Thomas and Chess's goodness-of-fit concept " Two different parent-child relationships when the children were toddlers predicted the development of conscience in children when they were five years old. Fearful children did better with mothers who used gentle discipline, while fearless toddlers did better with mothers who were very responsive".

To Thomas and Chess environment can influence the behavioural expression of temperament, as well as its underlying nature. There are some implications in this theory e. g. sensitive & effective parenting requires parents to adapt their expectations to provide a good fit with their children's temperament. Parents of children with challenging temperaments need help to understand/manage behaviours.

To understand a child's temperament parents are a central source of information and it is depend on how they interpret children's behaviour. But there is strong need to be integrated with evidence from other methods. It is <https://assignbuster.com/psychology-essays-temperament-behaviour-inherited/>

also important to know that temperament does not excuse a child's unacceptable behavior, but it does provide direction to how parents can respond to it.

Parents should recognize the child's temperament and help the child to understand how it impacts his/her life as well as others is important. It is also important that parents own temperaments can effect on their child and they should recognize it. This will help to prevent and manage problems that may arise from the differences among family members. Temperament continues into adulthood, and later studies by Chess and Thomas have shown that these characteristics continue to influence behavior and adjustment throughout the life-span.

Environmental Influences on Child Temperament:

Modern researches do not deny the importance of the environmental influences on child temperament. They also believe in genetic factors. It is very clear that the environment is very important to temperament.

Behavioural-genetics researchers suggest that environmental factors differ within families (e. g., differential parenting) should be examine. There is need to do more empirical work on why individuals within the same family differ so much with regard to temperament. This will involve studying more than one individual per family and exploring the association of differences within a family and in temperament.

According to Strelau (1983), temperament is biological and inherited which may be developed and changed by environmental influences. But these changes in temperamental traits do not occur frequently. Elias (1981) gives <https://assignbuster.com/psychology-essays-temperament-behaviour-inherited/>

empirical support that “temperamental traits may change over several years in adolescents” (P. 39).

Personality development can be affected by temperament because of environment. For example, a very sensitive and less efficient person will react differently as compared to one who is highly efficient and not sensitive to the same hurdles, difficult situations, or other people’s behaviour. It is so because temperamental traits have a modifying effect upon environmental influences and are important in personality development (Strelau, 1983).

Torgersen, M. A. (1982) studied that genetic factors had an important role in children temperament but she also agreed that some temperamental traits are influenced by environmental variables. She studied 53 same-sex twins by using NYLS nine temperamental dimensions. She concluded that some of the temperaments were influenced by genetic factors and some by environment. According to Torgersen, M. A. (1982), “because genetic and environmental factors interact, it is impossible to know which part of the observed temperamental behaviour of a single child is ‘basic’ to the child’s character, and which part is developed mainly as defence against environmentally difficult situations”(p147).

Rothbart and colleagues (1994) defined temperament as biological stable based on two dimensions: reactivity and self-regulation (effortful control). According to Rothbart reactivity is believed to be present at birth and reflects a relatively stable characteristic of the infant and self-regulation is described in terms of attention and motor functions that emerge across early development. Different people have different level of threshold to react so

they react differently. In general, statistical associations between reactivity and self-regulation may be moderated by environmental factors.

According to Martin (1994), there are two relations between temperamental characteristics and children's common problems in school which point the interaction of temperament with the environment:

- Some environmental factors strengthen temperamental traits because that environment is linked with those predispositions in three ways: a) on average, children share 50% of their own genetic make up with each of their parents who then provide environments that are influenced by their own genetic backgrounds; b) children's temperaments elicit responses from others in the environment in ways that strengthen their disposition; and c) children try to find environments according to their predispositions.
- Temperament acts as a buffer against risk in the context of stressful conditions. It means that the role of the environment varies with the degree of influences of risk.

Schmitz et al (1996) studied genetic and environmental influences on temperament middle childhood by using teachers and testers ratings. Their results show that genetic influences are more significant in some temperamental traits. But their study rose many questions e. g. how and why these factors influences child development. More researches are needed to confirm these results.

Hagekull et al (1998) found that preschool temperamental traits are related to environmental factors and personality in middle childhood. They described <https://assignbuster.com/psychology-essays-temperament-behaviour-inherited/>

that “ Preschool measures of temperament capture effects of the individual-environmental interaction that starts already at conception. Because it is not feasible to observe temperament directly in its pure sense of inherited dispositions, we must consider our temperament measures and results as reflections of a developmental process involving both organismic and environmental factors. This process creates difficulties also in empirically separating temperament and personality”.

Kim-Cohen et al (2004) found that socioeconomic (SES) deprivation was highly connected with children’s low IQ and high antisocial behaviour. They also found that children’s resilience to socioeconomic deprivation have genetic and environmental factors. This study is not good in reliability and validity. Only mothers were examined. There is very little agreement on this study.

Although there is no single evidence which support only environmental influences on temperament but no one can deny its influence in some distinct.

Conclusion:

Temperament refers to the biological rooted individual differences, which are primarily inherited, and may develop and change by environmental influences. Changes in temperament depend upon the degree of the stimulating value of environmental factors which determine temperamental traits.

There is no doubt that temperament is a general term and is defined differently by many theorists. By studying the common elements in the <https://assignbuster.com/psychology-essays-temperament-behaviour-inherited/>

understanding of temperament we can say that there is no agreement with regard the understanding or definition of temperament.

The cause of temperament is still not completely clear. Genetics play a strong part in the temperament of an individual, but environment's role can not be denied. Temperament plays an important role in family life. It is important to note that parents' like children, also differ in temperament. Parents' temperaments have a strong impact on children, sometimes leading to positive interactions, sometimes to frustrations, and sometimes even to conflicts.

There is no single agreement on the dimensions of temperament. These temperamental traits need to define more clearly. For understanding the role of temperament in child development, more empirical work is needed which should be reliable.

According to David Keirse (1998), the important individual differences are inborn and develop into a few distinctive patterns and environmental factors can not change person's differences. And when these traits have developed, a mature character arises. Understanding these patterns helps us to understand ourselves and others. This means that temperamental traits develop with life experiences and maturation.

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