

A Study of Social Behaviour and Child Rearing Practices

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Introduction:-

Over the past few decades, one of the most striking trends in developmental and social psychology theory and research has been the increasingly cognitive emphasis in studies of social interaction. In this field, ideas parents bring to the work of parenting constitute a particularly interesting issue, making attention devoted to the cognitive aspects of parenting worth noting. In everyday life, people often mark comments and judgments about ability and its development, bear different perspectives about the nature of thinking and the way it is acquired and hold ideas about children, their development and the nature of parental roles, These folk perspectives characterize approaches to children and everyday ideas convey meaning that allow people to understand their surrounding world. The study of parents' social cognitions is, therefore, important in and of itself. Concerns in the course of seeking to advance our understanding of the way parents think, act and feel and to provide one way of specifying the social context in which development occurs have, hence, become common ground to wide range of social scientists.

But since for the growth of the plant, the seed has to be posited somewhere in the environment, so there is inseparable relationship between the seed and the environment. For the growth of the plant, not only are the chromosomes essential but the supply of water, air, soil, etc. also. In the same way it is natural to think, that the human organism starting life with the fertilized ovum planted in the soil of the womb of the mother, as it were, develops into the foetus under the influence of the environmental conditions of the womb and the supply of the necessary ingredients for its growth by the psychophysical, conditions of the mother. The human baby, at birth, is the result not only of heredity which consists in the quality of the genes coming from both the parents in the germ cell but also of three quarters of a year of pre-natal environmental life.

After birth, the child is subjected to more varied and complex environmental forces in relationship with which his growth continues. This inescapable relationship with the environmental forces which influence the growing and unfolding of rudiments in the germ cell has not been quite realized by some writers, who tend to consider heredity as the chief marker of men. One such enthusiast said, "Nearly all the misery and nearly all the happiness in the world are due not to environment. The differences among men are due to differences in the germ cells with which they are born. The environmentalist (like the Behaviourist) going to the other extreme, challenged the doctrine of heredity and asserted that the subtle socialized types of learning entirely accounted for the development of human beings. Watson, for example, wrote in 1925: "There is no such thing as an inheritance of capacity, talent, temperament, mental constitution and characteristics. "The behaviorists believe that there is nothing from within to develop You do not need anything else in the way of raw material to make a man, be that man a genius, a cultured gentleman, a rowdy of a thug.

But even Watson could not totally deny the inheritance of physical structure as he said, "yes, there are heritable differences in form, in structure, but the mere presence of these structures tells us not one thing about function. There is no doubt that habits, emotional reactions and other behaviour patterns are largely the result of training, but insofar as Watson accepted heritable differences in structures he accepted inheritance, since function being, to a certain extent, a correlative of structure, the potentials of functions become inherited when the structure is inherited.

However, though admitting that there was a distinct difference in the development and function of traits transmitted through the germ-plasm (such as physical resemblance between parents and children) and those individually acquired, Watson as an ardent environmentalist thought that the innate behaviour patterns were nothing but a series of adaptive responses or a chain of "concatenated reflexes". But the order of the unfolding of the separate elements or reflexes is itself a heritable character, as the capacity to learn is inborn.

But the heredity-environment controversy seems futile since if two trees, say a maple and an elm, standing side by side put out new leaves in spring, neither heredity itself

nor environment alone can explain the difference between the leaves. Without the hereditary factors in the different seeds, there would be no leaves and without the environmental factors of warmth, moisture, etc., there would be no growth and no leaves would come out. Heredity and environment seem to work together in every manifestation of life.

Many experimentalists support this view. Jennings, on the basis of his genetic studies by observation of and experiments on the fruit-fly, in particular, concluded that if the environment produced a given effect, it depended upon the genes (since the genes were not fixed or unmodifiable) and if the presence of certain genes produced an effect, it depended on the environment. Growth of an abnormality, for example, depends upon the defective gene and also on the environment. The defective gene growing in the normal environment leads to normal growth. "The growth of an abnormal abdomen, for example, in the fruit-fly would be in the moist environment and the fly would be normal in the dry environment. So the same difference that is produced in some cases by diversity of genes, is produced in others, by alterations of the physical environment and in the case of human beings by the complex social environment. For this reason, Jennings stated that "temperament, mentality, behaviour, personality-these things depend in manifold way on the genes, and that the highly complex personal characteristics as laziness, stupidity, slowness, lack of industry, ambition, patience and genius were also determined.

Parental Beliefs and Behaviours:-

Following the popularity of parents beliefs as a topic of study, and increasing number of research reports document the relation between parents' beliefs about child rearing and their parental behaviours. For example, research has demonstrated that mothers' and fathers' beliefs about the importance of teaching children mathematics are positively correlated with parents self-reports of engaging in mathematics-related activities with their children. Donahue, Pearl and Herzog (1997) examined the relation between mothers' beliefs about the power of the environment to effect positive developmental outcomes (e.g., the extent to which mothers believed that a child's school success depends on how much they are taught at home) and mothers questioning strategies during a referential communication task.

In this article, the degree to which mothers believe that children's development can be facilitated by a positive social environment is positively correlated with the amount and type of language mother's use in their interaction with children. More specifically, mothers endorsing this belief were more likely to use questions, as opposed to other forms of communication, to help focus their child in the important details of the task. Yamamoto, Holloway and Sawako examined the relation of maternal beliefs to several dimensions of parental involvement and found that mothers who felt more efficacious in the role of parent, and who construed their family's role to include supporting children's intellectual development, were more likely to report being involved in certain aspects of their children's education. Specifically, the results of the study have shown that maternal beliefs about family role construction (beliefs about the activities deemed to be important, necessary and permissible for parents' actions on behalf of the child) predicated preschool selection strategies (conceptualized in terms of how mothers collected information about the preschool before enrolling their child) and also indicate that mothers with higher parenting self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to report reading to their children on a daily basis. Other research has demonstrated that parents use of a particular conflict management strategy was based, in part, on their perception of how effective the strategy was and how well they could carry out the strategy. Fathers were observed to use behaviours directed towards helping children negotiate, reason and problem solve more often when they viewed these child-centered strategies to be relatively effective for resolving children's conflicts. Mothers' engagement in passive non-intervention was predicted by both their appraisal that this was an effective strategy for resolving children's conflicts and the perception that they could carry out this strategy relatively well. In addition, mothers were more likely to engage in parental control strategies, seeking to eliminate sibling conflict through punitive behaviours and controlling actions when they reported feeling relatively confident about their ability to enact this strategy. A research by Machida, Taylor and Kim (2002) has demonstrated that maternal self-efficacy beliefs was significantly related to more frequent involvement in home learning activities with the child.

An observation study by Kochanska (1990) showed that maternal beliefs turned out to have a predictive value in relation to the mothers control behaviour even after a lapse of 2-3 years. Damast, Tamis-Lemonda and Bornstein (1996) observed 50 mothers and their 21 months old children interacting while playing with a standard set of toys. Correlation shows that mothers who were more knowledgeable about early play development more often responded to their children's play by introducing higher level and more sophisticated play.

In fact, studies reviewed provide support for one of the most central tenets underlying the study of parents beliefs : that beliefs do relate to behaviour. As Miller (1988) states, "evidence indicates that there is a relation between what parents believe about children and how they behave toward children" (P. 277).

Moreover, some results show that those relations are in the expected direction.

Parental Attitudes and Behaviours :-

"The single most important assumption underlying the parent attitude research is that, attitudes determine behaviour, or at last are related to behaviour" (Holden, 1995, p. 379). Reliance on parental attitudes as indicative of parent behaviour or the home environment has stimulated an eager reception to the construct of parental attitudes and has resulted in a wide variety of attitudes being studied and concerted efforts to link childrearing attitudes with both parent and child outcomes.

Some studies have investigated the links between childrearing attitudes and parenting behaviour. Although it is clear that parental attitudes have not yet provided the key for fully revealing the mysteries of childrearing behaviour, investigation in the area has generated interesting findings for understanding determinants of parental behaviour and influences on behavioural outcome of parents.

Parental ideas are of undeniable importance generally because they have been considered the key to understand parenting in its own right, as they help to organize the world of parenting and afford organization and coherence to the tasks of childrearing. Further, it has been argued that parents' ideas generate and shape parenting practices. The underlying

assumption that parents' appraisals about their children's nature and development and about their role in childrearing would influence parenting practices has led to increasing attention on the role of parent's ideas in mediating parenting behaviours. In fact, the connection between what parents think and their behaviour toward the child has been explored in a number of studies and under a wide variety of conceptual headings (parents' beliefs, attitudes, goals, theories, schemas).

Irrespective of the labels researchers give to their constructs, the shared conviction is that; parents' ideas do matter and that ideas parents hold do relate to their childrearing behaviours.

Over a decade ago, developmental researchers were challenged to consider work by social psychology and to borrow models and methods which can be used to benefit research on parents' ideas.

As social and developmental researchers share the same concern for the study of ideas and the ways by which these connect to behaviours, they have answered the call and links between social and developmental psychology have been deepened, as those interested in parents' ideas have drawn more heavily on research from social and cognitive psychology.

As Moscovici (1990) wonderfully states, "after being separated almost to the point of losing all contact, social psychology and developmental psychology are beginning to return to a shared line of research, as pendulums which have been separated return by themselves to the vertical".

When pointing to the emergence of particular views of children or parenting, families and parents do not exist in a vacuum. They exist in a cultural milieu and researchers have increasingly considered the need to devote particular attention to conditions outside the individual, such as social and economic factors, influencing parenting functions and the nature of parent-child interactions. In modern society, and while humans are private persons, they nevertheless share ideas, communicate and consume scientific knowledge, use it in their everyday conversations and behaviour, have a common existence, form groups, construct meanings and invent institutions. In this unceasing give and take, ideas about children are conveyed. There is always a formal and common sense view of education, childrearing and

parenting. Given this state of affairs, it seems reasonable to propose that the study of parents' ideas may also benefit from the concept of social representations which stresses social life as the basis for the ideas that parents come to hold, and adds an emphasis on people as belonging to social groups. In that sense, social representations are essential for a socio-cognitive adaptation and reconstruction of everyday reality. Representations shape a symbolic reality and express "the complexity of the interrelations between internal and external worlds, between individual persons and the collectivities to which they belong, between psychic structures and social realities. The work of representation is multifaceted and moves incessantly from the individual to the social and from the social to the individual".

Unlike the belief systems approach, from the social-representations perspective the issue is not one of biases or imperviousness to information but rather a search for the dynamics of content areas that contribute and shape a symbolic reality. By providing collectivities with inter-subjectively shared meanings for understanding and communicating, social representations search for the articulation of the collective or social which the individual is an indivisible part.

Representations predominated in the mental life of individuals, Extending parental research towards considering the social origin of parents' ideas may provide a framework to understand the nature and consequences of thinking in the course of everyday life.

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