

ASPECTS OF FAMILY LIFE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

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Attitudes of South African Indians towards Disciplining in the Child-Rearing Process

G.F Schoombee and E.A. Mantzaris*

INTRODUCTION

Discipline as an integral part of the child-rearing process has been neglected in South African social science literature, but its significance as an aspect of the socialization process cannot be ignored. It is an integral part of the process of inter-generational continuity and must be studied in order to understand this continuity or changes that may occur over time.

Child-rearing practices have varied in terms of historical era and cultural environment and it may therefore be expected that the discipline aspect of it would also vary in its manifestations. It is a common idea that in recent decades in the so-called western world a shift has taken place from a Victorian tendency towards strict disciplining of the child, to a permissive tendency in which the child is given a considerable amount of freedom of action and self-determination. Western type cultural influences are strong in South Africa, being carried by the white sector of the population, and it may therefore be speculated that the tendencies found in the West regarding child-disciplining would also be found here. But it may be questioned whether this holds good for the other communities in the country; for example, the Indian population.

Scientific research concerning attitudes of Indian South Africans towards discipline in child-rearing has up to now been virtually non-existent. The present discussion is based on data obtained from a preliminary or pilot study into the nature of the Indian family in this country. This indicates the tentativeness of conclusions presented here, but the systematic procedures fol-

* Department of Sociology, University of Durban-Westville

lowed justify their presentation, despite the very limited sample and incompleteness of the questionnaire. It should nevertheless be remembered that the results indicated are subject to confirmation by a major, fully representative study that is being conducted at the present time.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The two main concepts used, namely child-rearing and discipline, need some clarification.

Child-rearing is seen here as an aspect of the more general concept of socialization. Socialization is a process by which the child and the adult learn the ways of a given society and culture and develop in such a way that they become participating members of that society. It includes learning experiences in every facet of social life, for example, among peers, at school, among friends and relatives and at work. *Child-rearing* refers to that aspect of the socialization process that consists of the teaching of the child by its parents or their substitutes within the home environment. It thus refers to the interpersonal relationship between parent and child and that part of socialization that takes place within the intimate family circle.

Farber (1964: 474) pointed out twenty years ago that sex and birth order of children, mothering and fathering behaviour, and relationships between parents influence the course of socialisation. In addition, however, various cultural trends are achieving prominence in family relations. These changes in cultural emphasis are probably related to various events in the past quarter of a century that have generated much interest in the welfare of all family members. With these changes, a focus on competence in interpersonal relations has emerged, especially among middle-class families.

The motives of parents in the child-rearing process can include creativity and achievement, status and conformity needs, control and authority, and the transmission of cultural values and norms predominating within a specific community (Le Masters, 1957: 352-355; Hobbs, jr., 1965: 367-372; Taylor, 1955: 452-492).

It is, of course, impossible to detach the child-rearing relationship between parent and child from the culture in which it is seated. The traditions and expected patterns of behaviour, including values and norms, that parents teach their children are drawn from the socio-cultural experiences of these parents. The main distinguishing quality of child-rearing thus lends itself to the teaching of discipline, and, indeed, it is within the child-parent relationship that a child first meets up with discipline.

It is well-known that socialisation and thus child-rearing patterns differ from society to society. The patterns of socialisation, for example, which predominate in a Kibbutz society are quite different from those in a caste-orientated society such as India. The Kibbutz system rejects the morality of middle-class European society, while the Indian system is planned in such a way as to reproduce the existing system of values and traditions (Stern, 1973: 37; Spiro, 1968: 68-79; Talmon, 1965: 259-286; Ishwaran, 1970).

The role of the school and peer groups in the socialisation process cannot be dismissed, especially when dealing with an ethnic minority group in the South African setting (Mantzaris, 1978). But, it is a primary factor in this process and as such its effects are of vital importance for the social, psychological and mental development of the child (Winch, 1963: 44-45).

Discipline is regarded here as training that produces obedience, self-control, and/or a particular skill. It thus refers to the inculcation of explicit patterns of behaviour in children which eventually determine their personalities to a considerable extent. What the content of the learning of discipline is, depends on the cultural expectations of the society in which the child-rearing takes place. In other words, conceptions of what discipline is vary among cultures to some extent, but the function of discipline is much the same everywhere. As noted above, the function is to realise obedience and self-control in the child, and eventually the adult, with reference to the cultural expectations of the group to which the person belongs.

It was indicated earlier that conceptions of the degree in which children should or should not be subjected to disciplining

during child-rearing vary in time and place. Where disciplining is no longer regarded as of considerable importance, it may be speculated that children could become subject to greater susceptibility to influences and ideas foreign or strange to those of their own culture, compared to a group which continues to emphasize its own traditions and disciplines its children to accept this. Discipline could thus be seen to also have significance for social change.

In the Kibbutz and post-Bolshevik Russia, for example, the emphasis was based upon the creation of a revolutionary society (Field, 1932: 51-55) and the differences between the sexes were not of vital importance. But, in western societies, the creation of a predominantly "middle-class" society tended to over-emphasise discipline as a process of maintaining the existing productive and social relations (White, 1957: 704-712; Sears *et al.*, 1957).

Parents of different educational, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, and economic backgrounds tend to see discipline in different ways. Some of them are more permissive/liberal and others stricter in their outlook on life.

The pilot study from which data were drawn for the present discussion explored various other processes at work in the Indian South African community. Among these were the effects of the process of westernization on this group, and their attitudes regarding the extended family group as compared to the western-style nuclear one. Indications were that younger, well-educated, and economically independent persons of comparatively high status were more susceptible to these "western" influences than were older, less-educated, and economically deprived persons of comparatively low status. The following discussion attempts to determine whether a similar pattern is observable in respect of disciplining during child-rearing.

WORKING HYPOTHESES

Two working hypotheses were formulated to guide the analysis of data. Each was structured in line with those used in the exploration of the other processes mentioned above.

The first hypothesis was that: *older, less-educated, economically deprived, and lower-status Indian persons hold more rigid/conservative attitudes toward disciplining children than younger, better-educated, economically independent, and higher status persons.*

The assumption is that older persons tend to try to perpetuate the traditional norms, customs, and cultural patterns of their group, but the younger, more educated persons tend to be more liberal in this respect and thus less severe as far as disciplining is concerned. This tendency has been discussed elsewhere in considerable detail with reference to this same study (Schoombee and Mantzaris, 1985).

According to Gecas and Nye (1974), working-class parents prefer their children to conform to the external parental authority to a larger extent than middle-class or upper-class parents. This is a point which supports the assumption that economically-deprived and lower-status families hold more rigid/conservative attitudes towards their children than younger, economically independent, and higher-status persons within the Indian community.

The second hypothesis was that: *parents belonging to different religions view the disciplining process of their children in different ways.*

Religion has an important function in providing persons, and thus the groups to which they belong, with a sense of purpose in life. It is the source of many important values and normative expectations for a group where it becomes institutionalized. It is thus intimately related to disciplining practices which will be influenced in form and purpose by the religious expectations. It was therefore considered important to study also the effects of different religious beliefs and practices on the disciplining of the child.

METHODOLOGY

The present report concentrates on the results of the analyses of data on child-rearing practices as these relate to disci-

pline. It is not the intention to give a detailed account of the methodological procedures followed in the study. It has already been indicated that the report is based on a pilot study and that the conclusions drawn are thus tentative. A detailed explanation of the methods employed has been given elsewhere (Schoombec and Mantzaris, 1984), and readers are referred to the descriptions given there.

FINDINGS

The tables that follow incorporate the weighted mean (\bar{X}_W) for each statement which respondents had to provide an answer to, and a table is given for each variable included in the study, namely, age, education, income, occupation, and religion. It is thus possible to compare the findings with the already stated hypotheses. The response categories are as follows:

Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Undecided	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5

The relevant statements were:

- (i) It is good for a parent to praise his children in private.
- (ii) Parents should never give in to their children.
- (iii) Parents should spend as much time as possible with their children.
- (iv) Children should not be allowed to interfere with the social or recreational activities of their parents.
- (v) Children at high school should earn all their spending money by working during holidays.
- (vi) Parents should always be obeyed by their children.
- (vii) Children should not be given allowances until they are:

Seven years old	1
Ten years old	2
Thirteen years old	3
Sixteen years old	4
Nineteen years old	5

(viii) Children who talk back to their parents should be:	
Whipped severely	1
Sent to bed without supper	2
Severely scolded	3
Told that another such offence would be punished	4
Given a quiet talking to	5
Given a less severe punishment than any of the above mentioned	6

DISCUSSION

The statements were planned to assess the attitudes of the parent respondents towards the concrete patterns of behaviour expected from children. Parental attitudes which could have an effect on the personality development of children were also assessed. For example, the statement: *Parents should never give in to their children*, assessed the relative rigidity or flexibility of parental attitudes towards the demands of children.

Age

With reference to the first variable involved in the hypothesis, namely, age, the hypothesis is not supported. The data in Table I show that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of old and young regarding the rigidity or conservativeness of their attitudes towards discipline in the child-rearing process. The so called "liberalism" or "permissiveness" that could be speculatively attributed to the younger generations is clearly put in doubt by the findings. This is especially evident in the case of the 20-29 and 30-39 age categories. The similarity of response for all age groups regarding statement number three, namely, *Parents should spend as much time as possible with their children*, indicates how closely knit the Indian family tends to be. The expectations of parents regarding the interference by children in the social and recreational activities of their elders are shown to be also very similar for all age groups. This pattern of responses indicates an emphasis on conformity by children to the expectations of parents, and tends to show a regularity of standard norms in the Indian community. It may thus be asked whether Indian parents tend to overstress conformity at the

expense of individuality? Linder (1953; 1956), has shown the sometimes ambiguous nature of parents' insistence on conformity. He views this as a barrier to a normal developmental process. However, Linder's writings refer to American society, parents, and children. It is therefore risky to make a direct comparison with the patterns prevailing within the South African Indian group.

TABLE 1

Age as a Factor in Attitudes towards Discipline in the Child-Rearing Process

RESPONDENTS			\bar{X}_W							
Age (In Years)	N	%	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
20-29	34	11,0	2,4	2,7	1,6	2,7	2,6	2,8	1,6	4,6
30-39	79	25,7	2,3	2,7	1,6	2,5	2,6	2,4	1,9	4,6
40-49	102	33,1	2,2	2,6	1,7	2,3	2,5	2,6	2,3	4,2
50-59	65	21,1	2,5	2,7	1,8	2,6	2,4	2,8	2,3	4,3
60 +	26	8,4	2,4	2,3	1,6	2,3	2,4	2,2	2,2	4,1
No Response	2	0,7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Education

The second variable relating to the first hypothesis was education. Again, the hypothesis is rejected since the attitudes of respondents belonging to all educational levels are to a large extent similar (Table 2). Only in the case of the eighth statement, namely that which refers to reactions by parents when children talk back to them, is there a significant difference. The reason is probably that the number of respondents with no education was small in comparison with that of persons of higher educational levels. There are no significant differences in the response patterns when the variables of age and education are compared. Although the younger generations are better educated (Jithoo,

1975), their attitudes towards the normative patterns which children should comply with seem to be no different from those of the older, less-educated persons.

TABLE 2

Education as a Factor in Attitudes towards Discipline in the Child-Rearing Process

RESPONDENTS			\bar{X}_w							
Education	N	%	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
None	4	4,6	2,6	2,1	1,9	2,6	2,7	2,8	2,1	3,6
Primary	78	25,3	2,2	2,3	1,7	2,4	2,2	2,3	2,5	4,2
Secondary	140	45,5	2,3	2,7	1,7	2,4	2,4	2,7	2,1	4,4
Technical	38	12,3	2,3	3,0	1,7	2,5	2,7	2,3	1,8	4,7
University	33	10,7	2,5	3,3	1,6	2,8	2,9	2,8	1,9	4,7
Other	3	1,0	1,7	2,3	1,7	2,3	2,3	2,3	1,3	5,0
No Response	2	0,6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Income

Regarding the third variable, namely income, the first hypothesis also seems to be unacceptable. Again, attitudes towards child-rearing expressed by respondents belonging to different income groups were similar to those expressed in respect of the variables of age and education. In other words, persons from all groups were basically in agreement. Table 3 shows that the only significant differences in attitude appear in respect of the statement *Parents should never give in to their children*, and the statement concerning *the attitude of parents toward children who talk back to them*. The response to the first statement tends to confirm the findings of Miller and Swanson (1958) who observed that individuals employed as entrepreneurs encourage individualistic behaviours in their child-rearing practices. This applied only in the cases of those respondents earning between R10 000 and R12 000 per year when these are compared with those earning less than R3 000 per year. The *overall* patterns of responses are

nevertheless very similar. For example, the attitudes of those earning between R12 000 and R15 000 per year are very similar to those of respondents who earn less than R3 000 per year. Regarding the statement about the punishing patterns used by parents, the first hypothesis has been partially confirmed. The data in the table appear to indicate a more “liberal” attitude on the part of economically independent respondents when compared to the more “conservative” attitudes of the economically deprived respondents. This seems to support Kohn’s views on the matter. He contends that the apparent conservatism of working-class parents is an inevitable process relating to their more general conservatism and traditionalism (Gecas and Nye, 1974).

TABLE 3

Income as a Factor in Attitudes towards Discipline in the Child-Rearing Process

RESPONDENTS			\bar{X}_W							
Income	N	%	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Less than R3000	42	13,6	2,3	2,3	1,7	2,6	2,7	2,6	2,2	3,8
R 3-4000	54	17,5	2,4	2,6	1,8	2,5	2,4	2,7	2,1	4,4
R 4-6000	76	24,7	2,1	2,5	1,7	2,4	2,3	2,4	2,1	4,5
R 6-8000	50	16,2	2,3	2,6	1,5	2,2	2,3	2,5	2,3	4,6
R 8-10000	24	7,8	2,0	3,0	1,5	2,4	2,9	2,6	2,3	4,5
R10-12000	18	5,9	2,5	3,3	1,6	2,3	2,7	2,7	2,1	4,8
R12-15000	16	5,2	2,7	2,7	1,5	2,9	2,7	3,1	2,0	4,4
R15-20000	9	2,9	2,9	3,2	2,1	2,1	3,3	2,6	1,4	4,6
R20-25000	8	2,6	2,6	3,0	1,6	3,1	2,5	2,5	2,5	4,1
R25 000+	5	1,6	2,8	3,0	1,6	3,0	2,6	2,2	1,8	5,0
Missing	6	2,0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Occupation

The fourth and last variable relating to the first hypothesis was that of occupation (Table 4). Once again the hypothesis is not confirmed. The only significant differences in attitude were in

TABLE 4

*Occupation as a Factor in Attitudes towards Discipline
in the Child-Rearing Process*

RESPONDENTS			\bar{X}_W							
Occupation	N	%	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Professional, Technical	41	13,3	2,3	3,1	1,6	2,8	2,9	2,6	1,7	4,6
Managerial, Administrative	14	4,5	2,9	3,6	1,9	2,4	2,8	2,4	1,8	4,6
Clerical + Related	44	14,3	2,2	2,8	1,5	2,2	2,5	3,0	1,9	4,4
Sales Persons	31	10,1	2,0	2,7	1,6	2,2	2,4	2,3	2,3	4,5
Service Workers	27	8,8	2,2	2,7	1,7	2,3	2,3	2,7	2,0	4,3
Production + Transport	83	26,9	2,2	2,3	1,7	2,3	2,5	2,4	2,3	4,4
Not Economi- cally Active	38	12,3	2,3	2,4	1,7	2,8	2,7	2,9	2,0	3,9
Mining	6	2,0	3,5	2,8	1,5	3,2	2,7	1,3	2,5	4,8
Own Business	21	6,8	2,6	2,8	2,1	2,7	2,2	2,7	2,8	4,3
Missing	3	1,0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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TABLE 5

*Religion as a Factor in Attitudes towards Discipline
in the Child-Rearing Process*

RESPONDENTS			\bar{X}_W							
Religion	N	%	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Hindu	194	63,0	2,3	2,7	1,6	2,5	2,6	2,6	2,2	4,3
Muslim	76	24,7	2,3	2,5	1,8	2,5	2,4	2,4	2,2	4,3
Christian	37	12,0	2,3	2,8	1,8	2,4	2,4	2,8	1,9	4,7
No Response	1	0,3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

respect of the respondents classified as “occupied in the mining field”. However, the number of respondents in this category is very small and may be regarded as insignificant in comparison to other occupational categories. This result also seems to run contrary to a large amount of literature dealing with the problem of child-rearing in relation to occupational and social classes. For example, all of the occupational groups tended to show a conservative/rigid attitude to the statement *Parents should never give in to their children*. This tends to contradict Lipset’s theories in this regard, on the abstract level. Lipset (1959: 482-501) pointed out that in an affluent society it is the worker who becomes a traditionalist/conservative politically and economically, and especially in so far as child-rearing practices are concerned. Although doubt is cast on his findings by the present study, it must be remembered that there are significant differences between American and South African Indian workers. In America, workers have become affluent and live at a level similar to that previously only enjoyed by the middle class. This is not the case with Indian workers in South Africa. The results of the present study also challenge the findings of Kohn that upper-middle-class persons were not very conservative and more receptive to change than working-class parents (Gecas and Nye, 1974). The present data tend to indicate no significant difference in child-rearing practices among Indian persons in South Africa, whatever socio-economic group they may belong to.

Religion

The second hypothesis stated that parents belonging to different religions tend to view the process of disciplining children in different ways. It appears from Table 5 that the data do not support this hypothesis either. There is a clear indication that the conservative/rigid attitude again predominates, no matter what religion the Indian person belongs to. This may be due at least partly to the conservatism of the upbringing of the Indian parents when they were children as a general feature of Indian community life. The stern attitude regarding disciplining children thus emanates from the normative expectations of the community, as such, and cuts across the religions, however diverse these may be.

CONCLUSIONS

Discipline in the child-rearing process is very important, since it has an important function in the shaping of personality and attitudes towards social life. It is significant in preparing children for their future involvement in the structures and functions of society. With regard to disciplining in the child-rearing process, the present study has indicated that Indian parents have a strong conservative/rigidity attitude. This holds good in respect of a number of important social variables, namely, age, education, income, occupation, and religion. The same study has shown that in respect of the younger, better-educated, and economically independent South African Indians, the so-called western way of life has had a considerable influence in weakening traditional attitudes which are typical of the Indian cultures. Apparently this does not hold good for attitudes towards disciplining, since the present data indicate that all sectors of the adult population retain a conservative/rigid view of discipline. Perhaps this is an indication that a wish still exists that traditional values and norms shaped by the socio-historical development of the Indian community in South Africa be retained.

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