

***Parental Socialization for Emotional
and Social Development of Children in Urban Slums***

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Abstract

This paper aims at understanding the parental socialization practices, and behaviours for their child's emotional and social development, as a result of being situated in the urban slums of Mumbai. As an ethnographic study, the objectives of understanding the context and its influence on the parental socialization behavior have been carried out using 'spot observations' and formal/informal interviews. Data triangulation and thematic analysis proceeded simultaneously. There was an influence of the contextual factors like financial helplessness, lack of security, crowding, lack of family planning, no sanitation and lack of other resources, in addition to environmental risks and vulnerabilities on the parental behavior and belief systems. This influence reflected through behavioral responses of the parents/caregivers in the interactions, which were also rationalized as their learned helplessness and little control over situations and practices for the desired behavioral outcomes from the child. Issues like enmeshed social boundaries, overcrowding, and heightened emotionality of the caregiver and lack of understanding of the child's perspective had implications for child care behaviors. This reflects disengagement between the parent and child, other than fulfilment of basic physiological needs. Usual methods specifically operant, observational and cognitive were used for socialization. Children were socialized to understand the other's emotionality, while little emphasis was on the child's emotionality. This led to a suppressed yet socially appropriate behavioral expectation. Early gendered apprenticeship for household chores directed to the girl child was also observed. Interventions for empowerment of self and understanding parenting behavior are much needed.

Keywords: Parental socialization, social development, emotional development, child care practices, observation

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Socialization is a process of establishing wider and profound relationships, and inducing the individual into the social and cultural world. As Grusec and Hastings (2008) have inferred that it is not a one-way street but that new members of the social group are active in the socialization process and selective in what they expect from the older members of the social group. McLoyd (1989) showed that there are significant influences of the parental job and income loss on the child. Therefore, the present paper attempts to focus on the parental socialization practices and behaviours, and the influence of context with respect to the child's emotional and social development in the urban slums of Mumbai.

Banerjee (1986) has described family as the “cultural workshop”, where children are taught the basics of civilization. She also argues that the family plays a major role in shaping the personality, not because of the parent-child interactions and relations are prototypes of adult situations, but because the child unconsciously assimilates many attitudes and social expectations from parents. Language also plays a crucial role in social adjustment and is the chief source of cultural transmission to the child. Belsky and Vondra (1989) postulated that the insights of ecological model and parenting (or child development) are comprehensible within a specific context. Therefore, there might be differences in the parental behaviour depending upon the ecological and bidirectional aspects of context and could be dependent on physical health and temperament of the child.

Experience of living on low incomes influence the adults and children in a variety of ways including loss of self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness, damage to present and future health and well-being, feelings of isolation and restricted opportunities and choices (Beresford et al., 1999, cited in Ridge, 2009). It is also found that lower SES parents are more concerned about the societal compliance by their children, create home environment with higher parental authority over the children, and are punitive when the authority is countermanded. However, positive effects of parenting differ across cultures. Researches show that successful parenting is that which matches the domains in which the child is operating and responds to his current needs.

Mirabile (2010) conducted a study which inspires the present study with the focus on the relations between two facets of parental emotion socialization: direct or indirect socialization; three facets of children's emotional competence: emotional expression, regulation and understanding, and their relations with children's social and emotional adjustment. Parental emotional socialization and children's emotional competence are multi-faceted, rather than unitary processes. Additionally, the aspects of children's emotional competence are linked (directly or indirectly) to the parental emotional socialization behaviours and children's social and emotional adjustment. A significant research in Gujarat slums (India) defines the emotional socialization as a result of the “emotional ecology” created by the ecological conditions, environment they live in, their families and the everyday practices of the families and other people around (Pai, 1998).

It was found through the previous researches that (a) majority of the researches are based on the parent-child relationships, attachment patterns, gender roles, SES influences on behaviour, family structures, but little emphasis is on the interplay of the socio-cultural context of the family, its influence on the everyday practices of the families and their outcomes, and (b) researches have been done on the socialization

behavior and practices, but little focus is on the parental intention of emotional and social development while socializing their children. The framework, thus, adopted was based on the assumption that the human functioning is central to the context of the everyday practices of the people, and that the family's role in socializing the child through the unconscious assimilation of attitudes, social roles and expectations from the everyday practices and parental behaviours is vital to the emotional and social development and socialization of the children as well.

Methodology

Research done by T.S. Saraswathi (1988) entitled '*Invisible Boundaries: Grooming for adult roles*', has been a significant study in the Indian literature of child socialization especially in the 'cultures of poverty', also because of the use of naturalistic observation through 'spot observations' and interview methods. Based on this research, some methodological understanding has been utilized for the consolidation of the present paper.

The question which boggles, with the concern of caregiver's perspective, is: "*What are the parental practices in terms of their behaviours and practices as they socialize or facilitate their child's social and emotional development?*" Leading to the objectives of the study, focusing majorly on the '*understanding of the parental socialization with special focus on emotional and social behaviours*', the lines of inquiry are listed below:

1. Understanding the context of the community
2. The nature of interactions between the parent/adult/another child for promoting social behaviors and emotional development in children

1.1 Positionality as a researcher

As a researcher, with certain premises in my mind, regarding understanding the differences in the context from the world outside, what made this community not grow beyond its situations, and if it was possible to lower the stress, vulnerabilities and lack of resources in life and improve their quality of life. But in the field, I realized that most people talked about the basic physiological needs fulfillment. The basic premise of understanding the risks, vulnerabilities and stressors in parenting and socialization by parents with due respect to the Maslow's need hierarchy was complemented with several other important aspects like family dynamics and other contextual factors. As Horwitz's (1999) explanation of the sociology of mental disorder, the nature of symptoms is culturally dependent and object of explanation are multiple responders, but not the individual, which also has the social constructionist perspective. Along with the contextual understanding, I had adopted the lens of social constructionism with a belief that it is the culture and the context that shapes the individual. But this paper is about the extent and process of these influences in the reality of urban slums.

1.2 Methods and tools used in present study

Being an ethnographic study with data triangulation, three different modes of data were used as the source for final analysis and interpretations: observations (particularly spot-observations), formal/informal interviews and field notes.

The parent-child interactions were observed for approximately 15 to 30 seconds and then relevant field notes were taken simultaneously. One such observation was

considered one unit, and applying this technique of spot observation, each family was observed for at least 3 days (minimum 6 hours a day each). During observation, the informal conversation was made by the family members, followed by the formal interviews and field notes. Other factors like family relationships, child's age, caregiver's age, etc added to the complexity of the data.

1.3 Sample

Sample included 9 families, which were from different occupational backgrounds, like rag picking, beggary, carpentry, tailoring, etc. The inclusion criteria of the sample were based on the structure of their family where at least one child should be in the age group 3-6 years. Another important factor considered was the variety of situations and dynamics of the families, i.e. families with different situational difficulties. The sample selection was facilitated by one of the project coordinators of a local NGO. Mumbai slums are a vast area to cover within a yearlong study; therefore, the focus was on identifying the differences in the encroachment areas and the old slums for sample selection. As per the information by the NGO, encroachment areas were least researched areas, therefore, it was also incorporated as one of the inclusion criteria. Therefore, the sample included only those families belonging to the encroachment areas.

Themes emerged from data triangulation

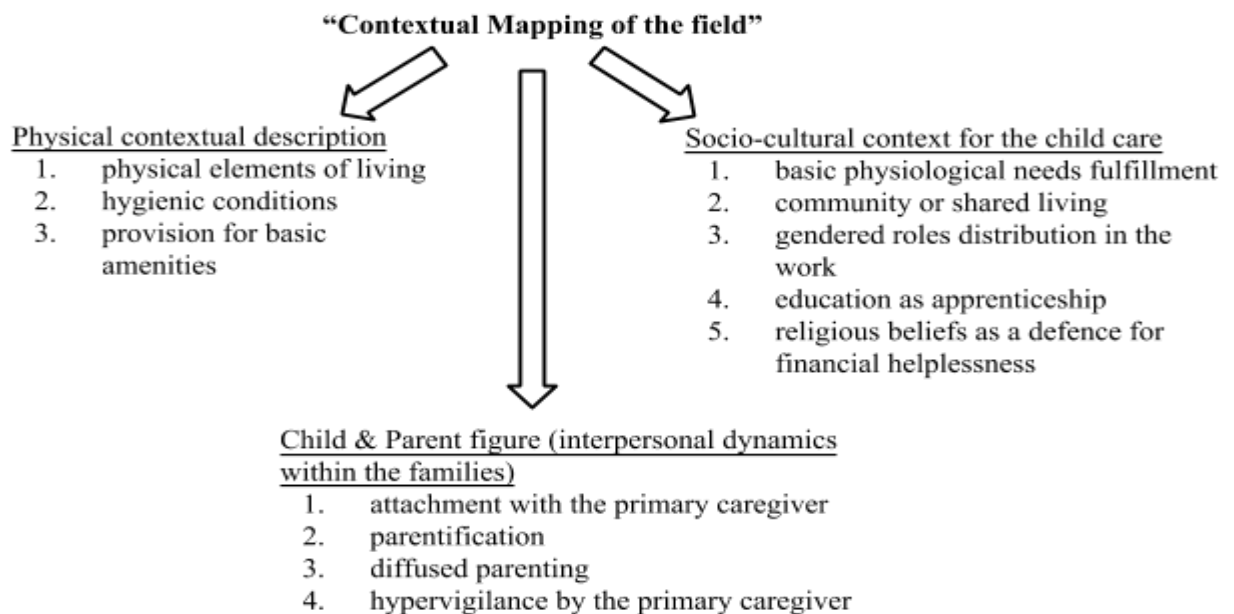


Figure 1: Themes from data triangulation highlighting contextual understanding of the field

In the field, they have one Primary Health Centre (PHC) 3 km away from their homes and unaffordable. The health post is inadequate with staff & medical supplies to cope up such a large population. There is always lack of drinking water which is at times provided by BMC, alternately after 2 to 3 days. This portable water is black-marketed in encroachment areas by some political leaders at the rates of Rs. 60 per drum and Rs. 30 per gallon. The area is connected by 'kutcha' roads and is marshy and muddy for most part of the year, with no streetlights. There was one municipality school

nearby, with low enrolment rates as compared to the religious schools or Urdu schools. The houses were just 10 square feet blocks for each family, within which they had to accommodate their entire family with all their belongings. People in the slums called it 'pattra wale ghar' ('houses made of tin').

Basic physiological needs fulfilment

The focus of parent-child interactions in the families was on the needs fulfilment, like providing them food, or ordering them to do certain tasks. A 6 months pregnant mother, talked to her children when she was giving them food, or stopping them from creating nuisance and would say, "Come here and have food", or angrily stop them from creating nuisance. The need fulfilling behaviours majorly included feeding/giving food to the child, and bathing/grooming activities. All families had different rationalizations about reasons for little communication, yet some common themes emerged. The caregivers were noticed to be highly concerned about the safety and security instead of the basic physiological needs like food, shelter, clothing etc., which directed linkages towards the importance of social protocols over individual or family needs. The need for power in the caregivers, as explained by McClelland (1961, 1975, 1976), was also higher than other needs. This need to power helped them maintain a strict and vigilant image so that their primary need for safety was also met. Much intensive research can be carried out along these lines in this context. One of the important roles acquired by most caregivers was of the vigilant parent. From their behavioural and everyday practices, it was evident that the caregiver/parent was also taking care of their 'need for safety'.

Community/shared living

Most mothers were noticed to be in emerging adulthood, and were unable to manage the responsibility of so many children at this tender age. Therefore, much help was required from the people around, and the family boundaries gradually fade, leading to community or shared living. Some mothers mentioned about the little social and family boundaries they had. Anyone could walk inside the house anytime, and all the family lived together, as if a part of the same kin. Therefore, there was enmeshed family boundary.

Gendered roles distribution in the work

The families in the slums were mostly male dependent for financial resources, while females being the caretaker of the family members. At times, all the members of the family, including the children contributed to the collection of finances for their survival.

Though families encouraged their girls to go out, yet consciously or unconsciously emphasized over submission directed towards girl child. At times, the elderly women would emphasize on the roles of women in household to the young girls. Also, there is little control over the child's everyday practices, as the parent/caregiver is little interested in instructing their children about the do's and don'ts, whereas a gendered difference is seen in this behaviour as well.

Education as apprenticeship

Their understanding of education came from the concept of apprenticeship. Most mothers said, "... she's a girl, and will have to manage household chores, that's why we think of putting her in some course to learn all these skills... if she learns

something better, she'll be an asset to the family... what else does a parent want?!" Education for them was the ability to help the family fulfil their basic needs like security, food, shelter, etc., as told by a mother.

There were gender differences influencing the choice of courses for the children, as one of the mothers said, "... will train my son for computers, and never thought of daughter... she'll manage household, but it's important for her to study in this world... that's why we'll put her in some course... if she learns tailoring, she can be of use to the family. Look at the girl staying in next lane, how much she earns?!" Gender compliance in terms of allocation of the tasks to be carried out by male and female members in the family was therefore noticed. After several awareness camps, people began to believe that women had equal share in helping their family to increase resources. This helped people in educating their girls to gain some skills based training like tailoring and parlour training. On the contrary, in families with father as the primary caregiver, the value of formal education persisted, and all the children were sent to the school on time every day.

Religious beliefs as a defence for financial helplessness

Most aspects of the socio-cultural context were influenced by the larger domains of the society like the religious beliefs, cultural practices, traditions, customs, and habits. Some mothers said, "Our religion doesn't permit us to do so." The learned helplessness and surrender to the macro-systems were beyond the control of an individual. Thus, response in such cases by the females could show was to confirm and comply with the social and religious norms.

High amounts of group pressure through the traditions, rituals, routines, and religious symbols on the families were prominent. This compliance led to the issues like unwanted pregnancies, and increased amount of liabilities for most families, which resulted in compromises in child care and development. It enhanced the vicious cycle of need for social acceptance among people, leading to increased rigidity of mindset towards the change. When mothers talked about the 'ganda mahaul' (insecure environment), their intention was to highlight their experiences and vicarious learning of the insecurity that prevailed in the community, adding onto the vulnerabilities of the family.

According to Herbert Kelman (1958), all the three major pillars of social influence, namely, compliance, identification and internalization were active to fulfil their needs i.e. the need for affiliation and accuracy.

Parentification

Parentification, as a major theme, reflected that the parentified sibling was the secure base for them, while the parent/ caregiver adopted the 'avoidant parenting' style throughout. Usually in such cases, there was shift in the roles based on the needs of the families. The primary caregiver acquired the role of the hyper vigilant and disengaged adult, and the parentified sibling, usually a girl child, became the nurturing member in the family.

Diffused Parenting

In families, with the lack of a secure base for the child, they were neither attached to their siblings, nor any parent figure. This led to the confusion for the child, in

understanding the emotions and intentions. For instance, in a rag picker's family, all the members would contribute in earning livelihood for the family, and everything was simply about financial stability, enough for survival, otherwise no such emotional bonding was seen. Also, the absence of the parent in the family increases the feeling of helplessness.

Attachment with the primary caregiver

Amidst these observations, there was an exception, where Sakina was the only child in the family. For her, more than the behavioural or personality factors, the belief system of the family played a major role in bonding the parent-child. Families which had an understanding of the child's feelings, emotions and their importance for the better development of the child had a sensitive and responsive behaviour with an 'authoritative parenting style'.

Hyper vigilance by the primary caregiver

Due to the unpredictable and highly crime prone residential areas with least security, the role of primary caregiver was to ensure that her children were safe and secure which led to acquiring the vigilant role in the family. While upon asking about the differences between the vigilance and hyper vigilance, it was difficult for her to demark the boundaries, and reflect on the disturbed communicational skills with her children. This showed the shift from attachment to emotional distancing, and leaving the onus on the child to learn from the environment, which also increased the pressures of social compliance. Similar to the 'development niche' proposed by Super and Harkness (1986), their beliefs and context influenced the parent's socializing behaviour, and tendency to selectively expose their children to the context, also referred to as 'planned socialization'.

Child Care practices

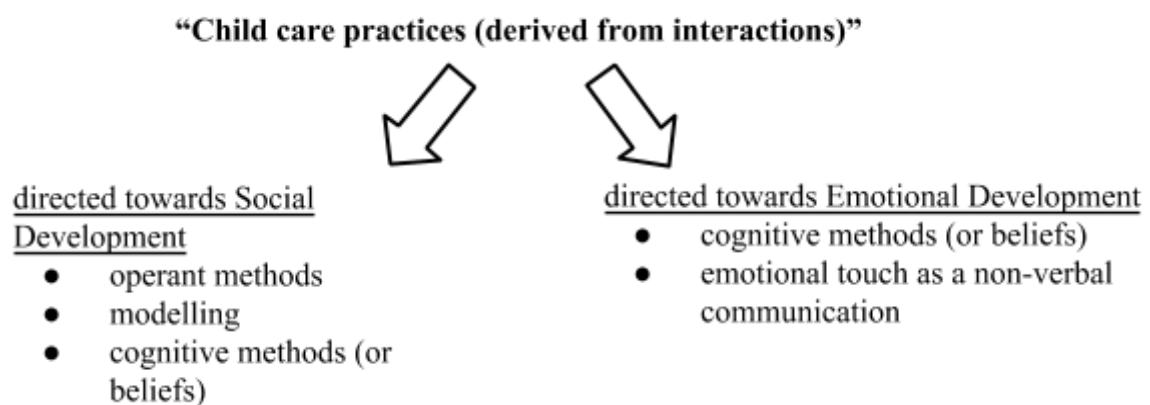


Figure 2: Themes from data triangulation explaining the nature of parent-child interactions promoting social and emotional development

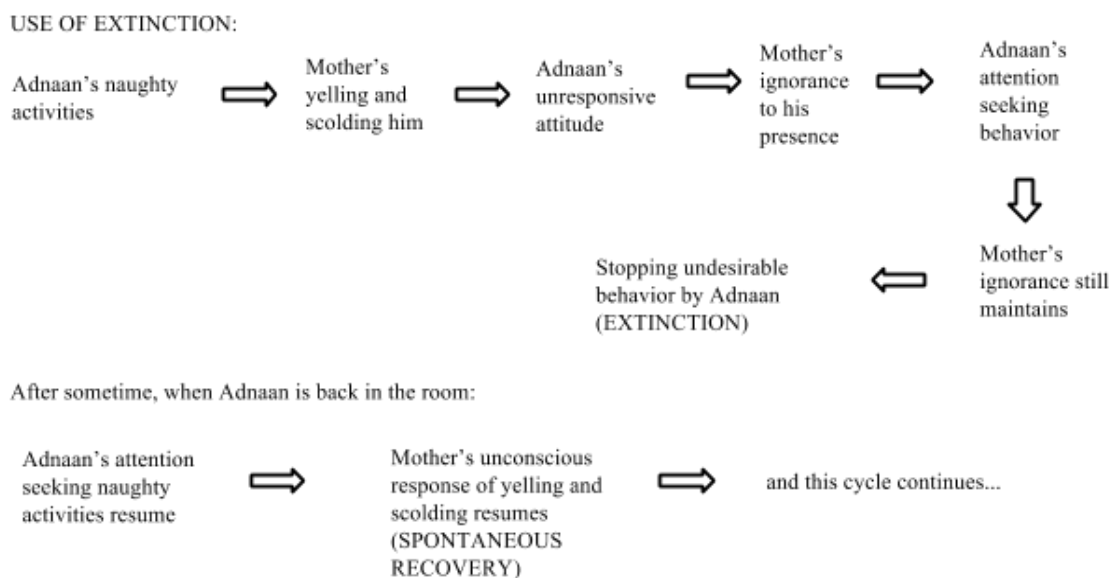
Operant methods of socialization for social development

From the understanding of the behaviourism by Watson and Skinner, the relevance of operant learning and verbal behaviour was emphasized. It was also noticed that most caregivers used either negative reinforcement or punishment as a response to the children. Upon asking for alternate behaviour, the rationalization was, "... if the child is wrong, it's important to tell him about his mistakes... I scold him, but it hurts me as well, ask your mother about it! It's a mother's heart, will hurt... but it's important to

stop him as well.” By stopping children from doing anything wrong, they would teach them socially desirable behaviours. Very little importance was given to positive reinforcement and feedback as a response to the child’s behaviour. One of the primary caregiver, a father, emphasized on the communication and listening skills as a parent, to provide them with a space to come up and openly talk about their emotions, feelings and thoughts. He mentioned television as the source of understanding of parenting he has, contributing to the contrary view of child socialization among these families. Also, he emphasized on the ‘shaping of behaviour’ by allowing the child to do certain tasks. He had allocated different roles to all children depending upon their age, and would positively reinforce them for any appropriate behaviour, referred to as ‘differential reinforcement of successive approximation’ (Peterson, 2004).

When the adult quits paying attention to the behaviour that is undesirable, when the behaviour doesn’t get the child what he/she wants, the child usually tries something else. This is called as ‘extinction’. When a reinforcing behaviour, after several repetitions, stops producing desired response from the children, then it stops occurring. The cycle of yelling and scolding the child and ignoring them if not receiving desired outcome is a repetitive cycle. This became repetitive because of the spontaneous recovery of the emotional reaction by the mother. In such a situation, Pavlovian conditioning suggests that there is re-emergence of the extinguished conditioned behaviour after a delay (Benjamin, 2007).

Figure 3: The pattern of behavioural responses in the parent-child interaction



Modelling for social development

Firdosh would lift the vegetable basket her sister lifted to get vegetables from the market, and would roam around in the streets holding it. Upon asking about her behaviour she instantly replied, “... got vegetables.” The child tried to imitate the person she valued more than anyone else, who is also a part of their family, as most of their behaviours are then influenced by their actions, also considered as ‘role models’. “... children will learn through observing elders, we can just do our respective jobs... it’s upon them to learn. If they learn it’ll be of their benefit” reflected the attitude of

the parents towards free will of the child to learning and acquiring social skills. This showed lack of controlling behaviour among the caregivers. From the parental perspective, social learning is a process which must demonstrate the change in understanding of the individuals involved (Reed et al., 2010). From the awareness about enmeshment of social boundaries, children got a lot of social freedom, which was suppressed at the later ages on the name of social compliance. But this helped most children to be socially active at a much early stage of development. Differences in the parental permission for being around with the peers were present on the gendered comparison. Dearth of communication within the family was mainly directed towards the lack of feedback to the child about the response given by the parent or dearth of positive reinforcement for any desirable behavior. The rationalization of rich-poor differences also existed among the caregivers. Their frustration, as a result, was vented out on the child rearing through aversive measures, instead of being interactive to convey their intentions and feelings of their children.

Cognitive methods of socialization for social development

It was amazing for the caregivers to know about the importance of emotional education and communication for child development. Instead, they rationalized their behaviour by assuming their child's perspective based on their own childhood experiences, and their parenting. Some of them also believed that financial helplessness is another reason for them to not be involved in such activities, as they have lesser time to focus on anything, but money making. Some caregivers also highlighted the cultural, religious and social pressures for not adopting to the new and better ways of learning parenting skills. Over emphasis on the basic needs fulfilment also led to such outcomes. Therefore, most interactions would centre around the instructions or commands parents would give their children, and yelling on them when not done the expected work properly. The miscommunication between the mother's intention and the behaviour conveyed created a lot of differences in the expected behaviour from the child. Such gaps in the interactions had significant implications for child care, as the parental frustration is being transferred to the child through their socialization behaviours. Absence of synchronization in the non-verbal and verbal messages led to the confusion and undesirable behaviours by the children. Therefore, there is high need for promoting better interactions in families to integrate the parent-child bonding.

Cognitive methods of emotional socialization

Trevarth et al (1999) suggested that parental sensitivity increases the willingness of the children to comply with the socializing agent's directions. In the community, almost all the parents used cognitive methods of socialization like giving directions or instructions and setting standards for the children, but never conveyed their intentions behind.

When a girl came out in towel after bath, when I was in the room; her mother was concerned about her privacy and was constantly keeping a check on the behaviour around. Therefore, this conveyed Mehak, her mother's intention of her safety and helped in setting standards of socially appropriate behaviour. "... Bath properly... and don't roam around in the towel, what will teacher ji say?" said Mehak's mother. Such questions act as a probe to be sensitive to other person's emotions and feelings about their action. On the other hand, no attention is paid to her emotions. Especially among girls, this behaviour was implied to increase their social compliance, which may

become reason for the inability to step out of the already existing social beliefs and norms.

Emotional touch as a non-verbal communication

Attention of the caregiver is an important precursor for the child to feel connected to the socializing agent. This was prominently displayed when Firdosh, after fighting with her peer, came running to feel comforted by her sister, ignoring the mother completely. Her sister hugged her and wiped off her tears, which helped her feel comfortable in highly anxious state. This showed that 'emotional touch' for a child is extremely important to feel connected, which is given least preference by the caregivers. Some mothers would ask their children about their feelings, constantly communicate about it, and baby talk with them. Such an awareness and sensitivity was not present in many families. In fact the thought of conveying and understanding child's emotions led to an expression of amazement and shock among most caregivers. Although while teaching their children socially appropriate behavior, parents considered important to teach them worth of other's feelings, but there was no thought about the child's emotional needs. Their language of expressing emotions and their understanding was also quite limited leading to limited emotional expressivity.

Discussion

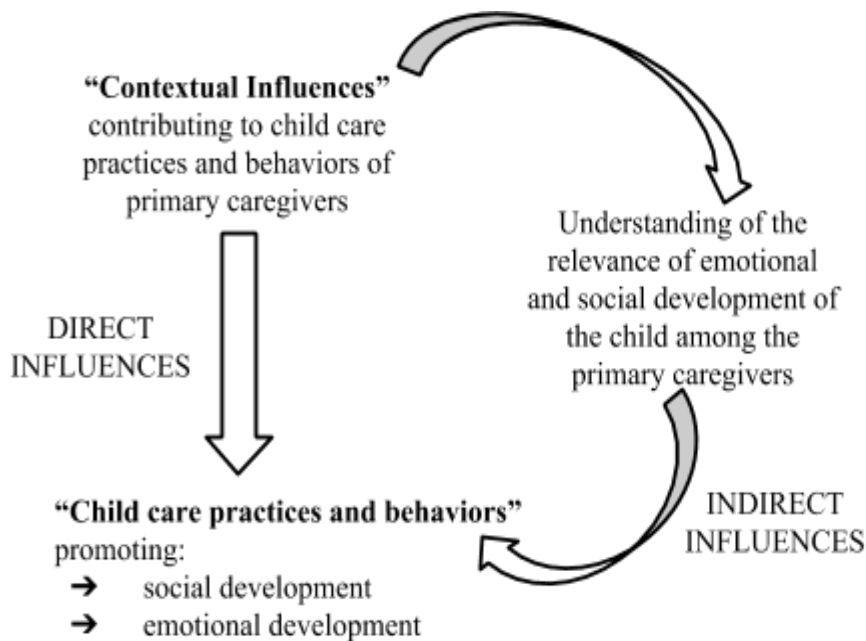


Figure 4: Overview of themes with interplay between two objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to focus on the parental behaviours and practices influencing child's social and emotional development in a given context. According to Patterson (1997), reinforcement contingencies were significant in development and inhibition of anti-social behaviour. Contrary to this view, the themes in this study reflected that the use of negative reinforcement and punishment was most preferred, while no relevance was given to the positive reinforcement or feedback for the children. Maccoby (2007) had highlighted that the major conflict in parenting lied in understanding the best use of parental control as support to the children, rather than as a premise of exercising authority over the children to expect compliance. This shift in the parental frustration

onto the children may have serious consequences for the children. The psychological control in this community as compared to the behavioural control was more often. Barber (2002) suggested psychological control involves attempts to influence the child's emotional state, and guilt induction, withdrawal of love and parental intrusiveness, while behavioural control involves monitoring their child's activities, setting reasonable rules and enforcing them with autonomy. For the emotional socialization of children, it is considered essential to sensitize the children towards their own as well as other's emotionality. Frijda (1986) suggested two ways of expressing emotions, from which the evaluative connotation was prevalent. Due to lack of emotional language, there was always a difficulty in expression. On the other hand, there was little or no focus on the subjective reference of the emotions, in this community, especially for children.

The parental socialization behaviours and practices centred essentially around teaching their children socially acceptable behaviour, influencing their emotional development. Kaplan and Chen (2001) had suggested that most parents tended to follow the similar parenting styles which they had been exposed to, reinforcing the culture of poverty. Similar observations, in the community, suggested that learned helplessness was a result of the internalization of the culture of poverty, that it influenced most parents, and their behaviours and practices. The contagion models of explaining the influence of poor environment on the learning and acquisition of parental behaviours and beliefs also suggested the similar aspects of development (Jencks & Mayer, 1990). But this paper highlights learned helplessness as a rationalization for the disempowered behaviour of parents. Saraswathi (1988) has talked about the resistance to change in the poverty context, she highlighted that the awareness about little scope for upward mobility among the people acted as a reinforcer for social compliance. The most acceptable entry point for the change in this community could be school education for boys and skill education for girls at least at ideational level. The levels of awareness about the usefulness of education, though discriminant, holds little importance for the families in the present community.

In certain cases, the heightened emotions were displaced onto the child, while in other situations the parent withdrew from the engagement with the child. The heightened emotionality of the caregiver due to enmeshed social boundaries and unmanageability of different family systems was evident. Trevarth et al. (1999) had emphasized that positively responding parents to the child's reasonable demands and attending them, were more likely to receive increased compliance to their directions. Therefore, the emphasis on the dyadic mutuality of interactions and understanding between the parent and child played an essential role. Thus, it was implied that there is little dyadic mutuality among the parent child relationships.

A reasoning, warm and affectionate parent-child relationship along with power assertion worked well for socialization of children. But, majority of the focus of the parental figures was on the power assertion in order to fulfil their basic needs and need for safety. Smetana (2008) had indicated that parental warmth, responsiveness, acceptance and trust were associated with greater disclosure. Whereas, in this community specifically, leaving alone the disclosure, basic interaction and conversation between the parent-child were intended for either need fulfilment or teaching socially appropriate behaviours, with an outward focus on emotionality. Most of their conversations reflected the religious conceptions and compliance to

them as a defence of inability to access and understand the realm of a better living. This implied a higher social influence and deeper internalization of these beliefs as an explanation to their rational or irrational behaviour. This occurred due to minimal empowerment and awareness among the caregivers in this community. These implications on the parental behaviours and beliefs also reflected that there was higher social compliance and resultant feeling of helplessness, with deep internalizations and identification with the pre-existing social norms.

Implications for future research and interventions

The dominance of the socio-political-religious influences on the beliefs, norms and practices has led to the inability to grow, despite the best efforts and hard work by the earning member of the family. Issues like lack of information or prohibition of family planning practices, reproductive health, malnourishment, sanitation and poor physical surroundings, add onto the vulnerabilities these families are constantly living under. A need for informed parenting was realized therefore, the formal education is another important aspect crying out to be addressed. Most caregivers (i.e. mothers) in the community are minor, and are less educated or unaware about the child care practices, and the respective challenges. This leads to a significant lack in the care provided to the child, despite the best efforts by the mothers. Thus, combined interventions from developmental and family therapy models and addressing the systemic issues are required. Guidance and counselling, deeper therapies and psycho-education would be preferable.

Methodology and other limitations of the study

The study though based on the ethnographic methods would have benefitted from more time in the field to further strengthen the understanding of the concepts, clarifying the beliefs and practices of the family as a whole. Yet the researcher did interact with other people who were available through the day, did note down observations and focused; spot observations were also done.

Observation method emphasizes on the probability of the occurrence of behaviour, the probable intent, and interactions of individual or behaviour of a particular individual. While noting the parent-child interactions, child's behaviour depends upon psychological factors like attention, level of cognitive development, retention, type of activity being observed, motivation, ability to reproduce the behaviour, and repertoire of alternative behaviour. The factors studied can be analyzed in the future researches, with an added perspective of the child's understanding of these socialization practices, and their developmental progress.

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