

Personal Development and Childhood

Unit 2 Contents

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Principles and Practice of Youth in Development Work

Unit 2 : Personal Development and Childhood

Introduction

We learnt selected theories on personality development in the last unit. We saw that many of them indicate childhood experiences as an important factor in this development. If we recall them, the psychoanalytic theories (eg. Freud, Erickson) and the phenomenological theories (e.g. Rogers) stand out in their emphasis on the importance of childhood experiences. The behaviourist, J.B.Watson argued that *the child's mind was like a blank slate at birth*, waiting to be written on by its experiences. In this unit we will be discussing the development of a child as well as its personality.

Learning Objectives of this unit

As you work through this unit, you will become able to

- Appreciate the importance of childhood experience in the development of personality
- List the major factors that influence personality development in childhood
- Discuss the influence of each such factor in shaping one's behaviour

Early development of the child

It may be interesting to begin this unit with a quotation from Watson.
"Give me a dozen healthy infants... and my own specialised world to bring them up in, and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select - doctor, lawyer... and yes, even beggarman and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors".
(Watson, 1924)

Watson emphasises on a special world to achieve this feat. How would a child cope with the world as we know it? What factors in it would affect him most? What would linger on his blank slate (mind) and affect his later development?

Of the many factors that come into play during a child's early development, three major types may be identified as follows:

- The Family
- Socio-cultural environment
- Heredity.

The Family

In this unit we shall study the influence of the family on the personality of the child in detail.

The early childhood

If you watch a new born baby and its mother, you would agree that the defencelessness of the infant and the need for a caregiver raises the need for a child's first social relationship. Thus the voice and face of the mother or those of the mother substitute are the first things the baby learns to recognise. The bond that develops between the caregiver and the baby is called the attachment. Usually, the attachment to the father is slow in developing because of the lesser time spent with the child.

It is believed that the degree of attachment itself is not a perfect indicator of satisfactory personal development. A child who is made nervous by parents may attach strongly to them because they represent the only source of security. Even children who are cruelly treated or neglected show strong attachments to parents in the early years. Yet the children may sustain emotional damage from such treatment. These may emerge in later years.

A healthy parent-child relationship fosters better adjustment at home and outside. Recall the impact of unconditional positive regard you learnt under phenomenological theory in the previous session.

Parental style

The attachment that we discussed above would have given you an awareness as to how important child-rearing practices are to the child's development. Its recognition has led to the development of models to describe parental styles. The model given below has been described by Maccoby and Martin (1983).

Parental style	Child behaviour
AUTHORITATIVE	
Expect children to behave intellectually and socially as suitable to their age and abilities. Warm, nurturing, and democratic. Communication two-way.	Independent, self-assertive, friendly co-operative, happy and achievement oriented.

AUTHORITARIAN	
Controls without warmth. Demands obedience and hard work. Sets absolute standards disregarding age and abilities. No two-way communication.	Socially withdrawn. Girls dependent. Boys aggressive towards peers. May be self punishing.
INDULGENT	
Child centered making only few demands on them. Accepting and responsive. Lacks definite standards.	Positive with vitality. However, immature and lacks responsibility and control of impulses. May be aggressive.
NEGLECTING	
Preoccupied. Not interested in child's activities. Avoids communicating with children. Lacks concern.	Moody. Lacks emotional control. Delinquent. Prone to drug taking.

Figure 2.1 Parental styles and child outcomes

You must however realise that such extreme types given in the model may not be the rule. It is possible to develop many types that are in-between. You may recall that even during session 1 we agreed on such a compromise about extreme personality types.

According to Mohan and Kaur (1987), children of working mothers appreciated more the quality of parental time spent with them in comparison to ratings given by children of non-working mothers. This was despite the longer times enjoyed by the latter group. The observed difference has been later assigned by researchers to the need satisfaction provided in ten identified areas. Mohan and Kaur, (1989); Mohan and Grewal, (1990), in a series of research studies have identified these ten areas in which parents can contribute for child development. (Fig. 2.2)

Demonstration of love
Showing of appreciation
Nutritional needs
Clothing
Recreation
Health needs
Academic activities
Social group interaction
Financial needs
Preparation for puberty

Figure 2.2 Ten areas of need satisfaction



Activity

You may attempt this activity on your own if you dislike sharing personal information about parents with others. List the features of each parental style that you studied. Mark the most appropriate features that fit your mother, father and you. Try and see whether you can categorize your mother and father into a given parental style or do you believe they have a mix of characters that belong to different styles?

Family composition, size and conflict within

The child learns his or her social roles within the family. The members with which it interacts within the family are therefore very important. To understand this, we must distinguish between the *nuclear* and the *extended* family.

The nuclear family consists of parents and children. The extended family includes grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins.

In the context of the nuclear family, due to the increasing incidence of family break ups, the number of single parent families have increased. The children of such families may have to pick up responsibilities for domestic chores or taking care of younger children too early in life. Is this true of your own social frame work? You would be able to agree or disagree based on your own social awareness. Even in two parent families, the mother may no longer keep house at home. She may go out to work. This may be due to economic considerations as well as due to changes in social attitudes on working women. The children in many such cases are deprived of adequate parental care.

The nature of the extended family too is fast changing. Many families find work away from their home towns and find accommodation with difficulty. As a result, presence of grandparents, aunts and uncles in the family environment has become a somewhat rare event. You can ask yourself whether this is true in your own social context.

These changes may have opposing influences depending on circumstances. In some cases the presence of extended family members would substitute for parental absence. In others, their presence might add stress to the child due to too much control from too many members.

Parental types may become more important in this situation where the nature of the family is changing.



Activity

Group work recommended. Select a facilitator for the group. Request each participant to list the members of his/her nuclear family and the extended family and approximately assign the number of hours spent with each listed member over the last year.

Compare your list with others'. Discuss possible reasons for similarities or differences.

Family size

Studies have revealed that irrespective of social class, children from large families performed less well in reading, oral skills, creativity etc. when compared with children from small families. This has been explained on the basis that parents may have less time to spend with individual children.

These children are prone to demand more teacher attention at school hoping to compensate for this deficiency. The position in the family by birth and its effect on personality has already been briefly referred to in session 1. Due to the encouragement of family planning in many developing countries, family size now tend to be small.

Family conflict

A child may undergo stress due to lack of harmony between parents at home. Quarrels, display of physical violence, alcoholism in father or mother may have far reaching effects on the child's development. Worries at home may compel the child to be withdrawn or even become hostile to the world at large.

Socio-Cultural Factors

In the development of personality, the social interaction and adjustment play an integral part.

The adjustment depends on how well an individual learns to conform to the ways approved by society. This will determine how an individual will relate to others in society. It will determine whether an individual is at ease, confident and articulate with other people.

The values that an individual picks up depends on the cultural environment. You would have experienced this by now if you have been able to associate with people from other countries. Even within a country, factors such as religion, language, ethnicity or geographical position may give rise to cultural variation in communities, resulting in different behavioural patterns.

The recent revolution in the communication technologies have had a great impact through cross cultural influences across nations. You may recall much debate in developing countries on cultural impacts from satellite broadcasts such as BBC Star, CNN etc. that have been going on for some time now. The influence of television on violent behaviour of children is another effect of broadcast media on behaviour and personality.

In this section, we shall discuss some selected socio-cultural factors that are believed to be more important in personality development. They are the school, peer group, the community, and mass communication.

The school

After home, the next important environment for social interaction for the child is the school.

If children come from home backgrounds where standards are different from those taught at school, there is bound to be a *home-school conflict*. Unless the teacher gives due notice to such situations and tries to resolve them, the child may develop lack of confidence to face such a conflict. It may even lead to dropping out of school. This may be more relevant in the case of children from socially or economically disadvantaged groups. The child is bound to meet teachers and students from different social backgrounds and ethnic groups. The child's interaction with them would leave positive as well as negative impacts in memory which would affect future reactions to situations in the adult world.

Many schools try to build up specific images for themselves. They may impart values and ideologies to the child which would shape the child's personality and bring about marked differences in behaviour.



Activity

Group work recommended. Select a facilitator for the group. Request each participant to list the names of teachers they remember fondly. Write down the subjects they taught. List (if any) names of teachers you disliked. Write down the subjects they taught.

Did liking or disliking a teacher make you like or dislike the subject the teacher taught ?

Compare your list with others. How many of your colleagues have the same experience as you ?

Peer group

Each individual, whether in school or out of it, tends to form stronger links with a group of colleagues, which is referred to as the peer group. It is also usual that the individual then comes under pressure to conform with norms of this group. The need to be accepted by the group becomes strong. This usually brings about behavioural changes in the individual.

Drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, criminal and other anti-social behaviour has been attributed to peer group influence and pressure. Even if individual inclinations are different from that of the group, the pressure for a acceptance by the group influences the moulding of behaviour to conform to that of the group. Peer group influence is not necessarily negative. Depending on the group, it also sometimes reform individuals or stimulate better behaviour.



Activity

Group work recommended. Select a facilitator for the group. Request each participants to list the names of close friends who associate as group. List down ten things that you like / dislike / do / because that is what the group would approve.

How many of these things would you prefer to do differently ?

Share the list with others in the group. How many have similar responses ?

The community and neighbourhood

The community is an important element of the socialization of the child. Helpful neighbourhoods promote an attitude of co-operation whereas an indifferent or hostile one could promote a suspicious outlook.

The community could also nurture the concept of self. Studies have shown how African philosophical tradition locates the individual self firmly within the collective self of the tribe. The Western concept is however that the community is only an 'influence' in the development of the self.

Appreciation and recognition of an individual in a community can play an important role in determining behaviour. An NGO group in Sri Lanka called 'Sumithrayo' who help people with suicidal tendencies and depression, report that youth suicide rate is the lowest in Muslim communities. They attribute this observation to strong community support to adolescents.



Activity

Group work recommended. Select a facilitator for the group. Request each participant to list five occasions where either the community helped you or you helped the community in some manner.

How would you rate your interactions with the community? Select one of the following levels.

Very often Often Sometime Rarely Never

Put up the list for others to see. Compare your responses with others.

Mass communication

We discussed the importance of 'role play' and imitation in shaping behaviour. Cross cultural influences brought through mass communication methods such as satellite broadcasting have become a source of worry for many developing countries for this reason. Even the 'Internet' has caused concern in many countries. Access to pornography, violence, or even political ideologies made easier through mass communication, have been said to influence children strongly.



Activity

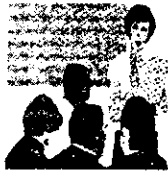
Group activity recommended. Select a facilitator for the group. Request each participant to list five favourite television programmes and five favourite characters. Against each of these, indicate whether there was any influence on your behaviour by the programme/character. Use yes/no response. Compare your list with others' in the group.

Heredity

What had been discussed so far in this session were external social influences on personality development. However, heredity or the *genetic information* passed on to an offspring from the parents has been recognized as an important influence on behaviour.

Let us start with observations on animals. Different breeds of dogs display different behaviour. Some are friendly, others aggressive. Some are timid, others bold. Variations also exist within a breed. Sometimes puppies of the same litter are so very different in behaviour. Try to recall your experiences with animals. Such differences are attributed to *genetic variation*. Differences in behaviour have been observed in new born infants. These cannot be explained using social influence as it is too early in their life to have such varied experiences. Behavioural differences in activity, passivity, fussiness, cuddliness etc. have been explained on the basis of genetic differences. These differences may in turn bring variation in the manner in which the infants will react with their environment.

Experimental evidence for genetic influence has been gathered through studies of twins. Twins are called *monozygotic* when a fertilized egg divides to produce two cells, each of which would produce an embryo. The twins produced are identical genetically. When two eggs are fertilized separately at the same time and give rise to twins, they are called *dizygotic*. Such twins exhibit genetic variation. Studies recorded have looked at twins reared together as well as separately. They have shown that behavioural similarities between monozygotic twins are twice as much as in dizygotic twins. The environment had practically no effect on similarities in sociability, impulsiveness, aggression and emotional sensitivity. These studies have suggested that genetic factors account for about 50 per cent of the range of behavioural differences found in a given population.



Activity

Group work recommended. Select a facilitator for the group. Request each participant to list in the order of priority, factors that have influenced his/her own childhood. Share lists with one another and compare.

Unit summary

This unit discussed the influence of childhood experiences in the development of the personality of individuals is discussed. The mental and physical development of a child is largely governed by its family, social and cultural environment in which it is brought up and to a certain extent by the heredity. This unit discussed the role of each one of these factors on the development of the personality of individuals.

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