

Role of Parenting in Moral Development: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the role of parents in the moral development of children. A child is not born with disciplines and values. In the course of their upbringing they inculcate these values from the environment they grow in. Morality is ethics and values that are required to be an acceptable individual in a society. It is the sole duty of the parents to shape the personality of their child through proper guidance and nurturing strategies. This paper reviews the studies exploring moral development among children and the role that different parenting styles and family dynamics might play. The review suggests that parents play a constructive role in the child's personality by adopting their psychological strategy to rear their child. However, in the exhaustive literature review very few studies tracing the moral development of children in the Indian context were found. Considering the importance of morals in the overall personality development of the children, this paper proposes the need for more studies in the Indian context and collectivistic cultures.

Keywords: *Role of Parenting, Moral Development*

Morality is defined to be that system of rules that regulates social interactions and social relationships of individuals within societies. It is the recognition of distinction between what is right and what is wrong. The mental disposition can be either backed by an acceptable set of social rules, customs, traditions or beliefs, or by a set of personal guiding principles. A child is born unknown to these norms of his society. In the course of his growth he inculcates these moralities through social interactions and under the guidance of his parents. Parenting practices, parenting styles and parenting strategies shapes the personality of the child to a greater extent. One of the most widely accepted theory of moral development was given by Kohlberg. Kohlberg (1973) identified six developmental stages on the basis of moral reasoning and ethical behavior, in three levels. Under the first level i.e. Pre-conventional, the stages are- (1) Obedience and punishment orientation, (2) Self- Orientation; second level i.e. Conventional under which the stages are- (3) Interpersonal accord and conformity, (4) Authority and social-order maintaining orientation and under the third level i.e., Post-

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Conventional, (5) Social contract orientation, and (6) Universal ethical principles. Each stage retains the moral for the later years of a child.

The pre-conventional stage is commonly for children where the moral development is solely concerned with the self in an egocentric manner. A child, in this stage hasn't yet adapted itself to the conventions of the society or has the idea of right or wrong. Stage one is obedience and punishment driven. The child's motive is to avoid punishment. He might refuse to do any wrong deed so as to avoid being punished. The second stage is driven by self-interest of the child. A child might be ready to undertake a task in lieu of the question, "What's in for me?" If the child is pleased with the possible returns for his task, he readily does that.

The conventional stage is for adolescents and adults where they judge their morality and actions by comparing it to the views and expectations of the society. They accept and own the norms and traditions of the society, irrespective of the consequence of obedience or disobedience. In stage three, an individual behaves in accord to the norms of the society in order to portray approved social image. The fourth stage is driven by authority and social order, where an individual is subjected by laws, dictums and social conventions. An individual avoids the violation of any of these laws or conventions just in order to avoid the consequences.

The post-conventional is the principled level, where an individual has their own perspectives and own principles. They might agree or disagree to the conventions of the society in accord with their respective principles. An individual moralist has their own ethics on life, liberty and justice. Many individuals fail to reach this abstract moral reasoning. The fifth stage is driven by social contracts where the world is viewed as a diverse holding of different opinions, rights and values that are mutually respected by individuals. Greatest good for the greatest number of people is intended thereby promoting general welfare. The sixth stage is driven by universal ethics and principles where moral reasoning is based on abstract reasoning. An individual acts in a specific manner not because they fear punishment or it is backed by law, but because it is the correct thing to do (Kohlberg, Lawrence (1971) Kohlberg, Lawrence (1974); Kohlberg, Lawrence (1976); Colby, Anne, Kohlberg, L. (1983); Shaffer, David R. (2004)

In addition to the role of cognitive and cultural factors in the moral development of children, parents also play a constructive role in the child's personality by adopting their psychological strategy to rear their child. Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive and Uninvolved are the known styles that parents undertake.

Authoritative parents exchange thoughts and ideas with their children, grant them freedom and also make sure to be strict when required. Parents guide their children in a manner by justifying why they should adopt the taught principle in their life. Children under such parents are usually matured and manage a well organized life. Authoritarian parents are cold

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and rejecting towards their child and make their child follow certain principle with force and not reasons. Becoming over-protective they tend to take all decisions for their child. They often over-burden the child with high expectations thereby leading to the formation of negative aspect of the child's personality (like depression, indecisiveness, anti socialism, etc.) when they grow. Permissive parents are warm and agreeable who hardly restricts the freedom of their children. This type of parenting usually leads to over-demanding, disobedient and undisciplined children. Uninvolved parents are usually so overpowered with their life's stress that they find it difficult to manage time for their children. They think their child is capable enough to take such decisions which is not even possible for them. Children lacking this parental interference guidance tend to suffer from insecurity and poor self-confidence.

Thus, the role of parents is really important in the moral development of their children. Home is the first school of a child. His behavior portrays how he sees his parent behaving. Parents unconsciously become the role model for every child. A child promises to be what he has been taught or exercise what he hasn't got.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A child is not born with the ethics, morals and traditions of its society. It learns what is right and what is wrong under the guidance and teachings of his parents. He is made aware of the rules and regulations that are required to be a part of civil society. The family atmosphere and the ways of disciplining the child affect its behavior. Right from birth a child develops closeness with its mother. We have learnt that it develops a trust or mistrust with respect to the care, affection and warmth given to it by its parents. Lack of proper care giving develops insecurity in the child in its later years. Nurturing the child does not depend only on the mother; the father is equally responsible for its moral development rather than only financial support. In 1987, researchers Lamb, Pleck, Chernov and Levine outlined three fundamental aspects of father involvement in a child's development— (1) *Engagement* i.e. direct contact and shared interactions with their children, (2) *Availability* i.e. presence or accessibility, (3) *Responsibility*-making resources available for the child. Their research also proposed that a father playing with the child allows the child to experience activation and understand test boundaries of the world in a safe environment. In 2001, Rohner and Veneziano, concluded, "Overall, father love appears to be as heavily implicated as mother's love in offspring's' psychological well being and health, as well as in an array of psychological and behavioral problems."

Laura E. Berk in her book 'Child Development' stated that child rearing styles are combinations of parenting behaviors that occurs over a wide range of situations, creating an enduring child-rearing climate. In her article we find the research of Diana Baumrind's (1971) observation of parent's interaction with their pre-schoolers which revealed three features - (1) *Acceptance* of child and involvement in child's life establishes an emotional connection with the child; (2) *Behavioral control* of the child through expectations, rules and supervision promotes more mature behavior; and (3) *Autonomy granting* encourages self-

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reliance. (Barber & oslen, 1997; Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Hart, Newell & Oslen, 2003; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Parenting is defined to be the process of promoting and supporting the various aspects of development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting styles are the psychological constructs representing standard strategies used in the child rearing. We are known to four types of child-rearing styles i.e., Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive and Uninvolved. The most successful style is regarded to be the Authoritative style as it has the involvement of high acceptance, adaptive control techniques and appropriate autonomy granting. A child raised in this style is found to be more mature and competent. They tend to be more responsible due the warmth and attention provided to their needs by their parents. The parents discipline the child in a comforting manner. There is close relationship between the parent and the child. Children are given the freedom to make their decisions backed by the values and disciplines strictly held by the parents. This helps the child to become more matured.

In this type of parenting autonomy granting is practiced where the child is given the freedom to make choices and decisions as a part of their learning. They are given the freedom to express their thoughts and ideas through a clear interaction with their parents. It is not that the every decision of the child is supported by the parents but when not supported the child is provided with a reason for it. It is the sole duty of the parents to guide his decision with respect to what is right and what is wrong. For example, Many a time we have seen kids want to take with them the little puppy they were playing with on the streets, but the parents forbids the child to do so by explaining to him the puppy is also a kid like him who might not want to separated from its siblings and parents. It is also important for the parents to understand the child's situation from its perspective. (Kuczynski & Lollis, 2002; Russell, Mize & Bissaker, 2004). Authoritative parenting is related to various aspects of competence – an upbeat mood, self control, task persistence, academic achievement, cooperativeness, high self esteem, responsiveness to parent's views and social and moral maturity throughout the childhood and adolescent period. (Amato & Fowler, 2002; Aunla, Stattin & Nurmi, 2000; Gonzalez & Wolters, 2006; Mackey, Arnold & Pratt, 2001; Milevsky et al, 2007; Steinberg, Darling & Fletcher, 1995).

In an Authoritarian child rearing style a child is granted kept under high behavioral and psychological control with low autonomy granting by manipulating and intruding on the child's individuality, freedom to express and parental attachments. The parents are usually cold and keep a rejecting attitude to the demands of the child. The parents usually demands maturity from part of the child and keeps high expectations with regard to the child's academics or any other field they are into. Parents usually look for perfection in whatever their child does. At times, it's in such an extent that they might fail to appreciate their even child's first painting which took great effort for their little one. The parents want their children to accept whatever they without explaining them why a certain behavior should be avoided. They want their children to follow them unquestionably. A certain principle should be followed just because they are told to do so. Children under these types of parenting styles

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might show excellence in their performance for a short period but in later years they are prone to adjustment problems, anxiousness, defiance, aggressive behaviors, depression, insecurity, anti-social, lack of self-confidence etc.

The parents become over-protective and take decisions for their child ignoring his point of view. They intend to keep in mind the well being of their child but it actually leads to negative aspect of their child's personality. In their later years, when the child grows up they find it difficult to take decisions with maturity. Having less opportunities of exploring in their early years, the children grow up to be excessively bold and undertaking and hereby prone to several hazards. (Barber & Harmon, 2002; Kakihara et al,2010; Silk et al.,2003; Luyckx et al. 2007).

Permissive child rearing style involves warm and agreeable parents who hardly take interest in their child's affair. They usually doesn't exercise any control over their children and remains inattentive or overindulgent. They parents are either too benevolent when it comes to their children's decision or they just doubt their capability to influence the child. (Oyserman et. Al, 2005) .The parents hardly places any demand before the children. Autonomy granting is usually excessive as the children are often allowed to make such decisions for themselves which they are not capable of for that age. Children under permissive parents lack proper discipline and ethics that are required to be a decent member of the society. They hardly follow any principle in their life and lead a routine less life. Granting of freedom more than necessity by the over affectionate parents often leads the child to be impulsive, disobedient, rebellious, over demanding, high dependency rate, reduced task persistence, poor academic achievement and anti social behavior. (Barber & Oslen,1997: Baumrind,1971; Steinberg, Blatt-Eisengart, & Cauffman, 2006)

Uninvolved child rearing refers to the emotional detachment and withdrawal from part of the parents. The parent hardly shows any involvement in their child's affair. Hardly any expectation or demand is placed before the child. The parents are indifferent to the decisions of the child or their perspective. The parents are so overwhelmed or stressed with their life's issues that they fail to spare time or energy for their children. This often happens for working parents. They respond to the immediate demand for their children but fail to engage themselves in promoting the long term goals of their children. The parents restrain themselves from establishing rules for their child, providing guidance about choices and monitoring the child's whereabouts and activities. Negligence from parents often leads to depression, anger, frustration, decision-making problem and anti-social behavior of the children. (Aunola, Stattin,& Nurmi,2000; Kurdek & Fine, 1994; Schroeder et al., 2010).

Working parents, thus, need to take special care to balance both their professional and the parental aspect of their life. Children under single parents (either due to divorce or demise of a parent) also need special attention and care. The parents should act as a shield and take their child's side with kindness so that they don't differ amidst their peers. The parent should provide their child with familiarity and allows friendly exchange of thoughts and ideas. The

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child should not be denied interaction with the other parent and at the same time he should be made aware of the reality. The parent is expected to maintain a friendly relationship with his/her child but also keeping in mind that lack of the other parent should not be a means to lead over permissiveness. The parent should deal with the child authoritatively and carry on the duty of parent.

SUGGESTIONS

An exhaustive literature review of the researches on moral development of children reveals that several studies in the developed nations have explored how moral development takes place over the course of life and how it is influenced in various ways by culture, parenting styles and different family dynamics. However there is a dearth of such researches in developing nations such as India which is a country of an altogether different culture, customs and traditions. The upbringing styles by the parents may also differ. It has been found that Indian children are usually brought up in a restricted environment while in other countries children are given more freedom to explore their lives and get an opportunity for self-learning. The research should explore the differences in the moral development due to the collectivist and individualistic types of cultures. In nuclear families, the child develops themselves in a creative manner by indulging in several curriculums while the children of joint families usually develop themselves by socialization with other family members. Furthermore, the role of parents in moral development of unconventional family dynamics such as single parent families, families headed by gay or lesbian parents and so on have not been focused on. Hence studies should pertain to influence that such parents and their parenting styles may have on the moral development of children.

CONCLUSION

This paper suggests that moral development is an important aspect of our personality development and influenced by several factors including the culture, traditions, family dynamics and parenting styles. Literature review suggests that among other factors parents play a pivotal role in the moral development of the children. However, considering the dearth of researches in the developing cultures on moral development and on newer family dynamics involving a single parent or gay and lesbian parents, more researches are suggested in this area to bridge the gap in the literature.

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