

A Critical Study on the parental beliefs and attitudes towards child rearing and education

Dr. Anil Kumar Chaudhary
M.A., Ph.D. (Psychology)
B.R.A. Bihar University, Muzaffarpur

ABSTRACT

The parenting style and attitudes towards child rearing and education is a very important aspect for the psycho-social development of the child. The present study examines the parental beliefs and attitudes towards child rearing and education, factors that put a mark on their development. The research was carried out on a sample of 522 parents (mothers-fathers dyad) aged between 23 years and 50 years old. The results have shown the presence of statistically significant differences between parental traditionalism/ progressivism according to the participants' gender and level of study, as well as to the gender of their children.

Keywords: Parental attitude, parental beliefs, child rearing, educational practices, parenting style;

INTRODUCTION

In the context of early socialization and psycho-affective development of the child, the role and the importance of the parental environment for the child's psycho-social adaptation are increasingly emphasized. Ever since its birth, the child comes into contact with the parental beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the child rearing and education which will put their mark on the whole of its development. The literature contains numerous studies that have highlighted the parenting influence on the social, cognitive affective development of the child: gender stereotypes (Bandura et al., 2011; Fagot & Hagan, 1991; Langlois & Downs, 1980; Leaper, 2000; Pomerantz, Ng, & Wang, 2004; Siegal, 1987), behavioural disorders (Romano, et al., 2005); school success (Joussemet, et al., 2005; Mattanah, et al., 2005; Tocu, 2010; Zadeh, & Im-Bolter, 2006), parental beliefs influencing the parental attitudes and behaviours which, in turn, will have consequences on the psycho-social adaptation and integration of the child (e.g. McGillicuddy-Delisi, 1985; Murphey, 1992). Also, previous studies (e.g. Bussey, & Bandura, 1999; Hayden McPeak, et al., 1993; Sokal, Seifert, & Piotrowski, 2001) mention differences with regard to the parental educational practices according to children's gender or parents' gender, highlighting beliefs, attitudes and differentiated behaviours for boys and girls, both from the male parent and the female parent. Most theoretical approaches (regardless of the nature of the main determinants: psychological, biological and socio-structural which constitute the core of the theoretical perspective) related to the child development acknowledges and emphasize the

great impact of social factors, represented primarily by the parental environment, these defining, shaping and affecting the entire journey of the child and future psychosocial adult.

METHODOLOGY

The present study explores the parenting beliefs towards child rearing and education and the factors that put a mark on their development. The hypothesis of this study: we assume that the level of parental beliefs towards child rearing and education is influenced by the participants' gender and study level. Thus, male parents will demonstrate a higher level of traditional beliefs than those of female parents; parents with higher education will have a higher level of progressive beliefs than those with secondary education or secondary school.

2.1 Participants

522 adults, parents of 291 preschool age children (aged 2-7 years old) have taken part in the research. Participants were aged between 23 years and 50 years old ($m = 33.76$, $ab.st. = 4.40$). Their main characteristics are as follows: 50.96% of them are parents of boys and 49.04% of them are parents of girls; 4.2% have secondary school education; 38% have high school education; 57.8% have higher education, their distribution is based on gender and educational level as shown in table 1.

Table 1 Sample distribution according to gender and level of education

Gender	Style Level	Attendance (%)
Male	Secondary school education	5.9
	High school education	40.7
	Higher Education	53.4
Female	Secondary School Education	2.5
	High School Education	35.3
	Higher Education	62.2

2.2 Instruments

In order to assess the progressive-democratic or traditional-authoritarian attitudes of the parents towards child rearing and education, it has been used the Parental Modernity Scale of Child Rearing and Educational Beliefs (PMS) developed by Schaefer and Edgerton (1985). These attitudes are assessed through two subscales: traditional beliefs (e.g. "parental rules must conduct their children's behaviour") contain 22 items (e.g. "children should always obey the teacher") and progressive belief (child's self-directed behaviour) with 8 items ("children learn better by doing things themselves than listening to the others"). Parents evaluate their attitude toward those assertions on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "I do not agree at all" and 5 "I totally agree". Following the PMS administration, two scores corresponding to two subscales can be calculated, which represent the traditional and the

progressive beliefs, to which the score of the total value of the traditional-authoritarian attitudes are added. For subscales, the score is calculated by adding the 8 items and to the existing 22, a high value signifying conservative and modern beliefs with respect to child rearing and education. The score that aims at the total value of the traditionalist beliefs will be calculated by adding up the traditional items and the inverted values obtained at the progressive items, a high score reflecting the strong authoritarian beliefs.

RESULTS

The parental traditionalism or modernism referring to the attitudes towards child rearing and education was assessed with Parental Modern Scale (PMS) for which it has been obtained a coefficient of internal consistency of .79. The primary processing of data obtained after the administration of PMS was done to calculate the two scores corresponding to PMS scales: the score of traditional beliefs and the score of progressive beliefs related to child rearing and education, to which it is added the total score of traditionalist-authoritarian beliefs, obtained by adding up the traditionalist and progressive values, reversed. An individual is deemed to manifesting the more traditional beliefs the more the value of those two scores which evaluate them is high. Table 2 shows the average, the median and the standard deviation for the four score results: traditional beliefs, progressive beliefs, traditional beliefs obtained by reversing the progressive ones and the traditionalist-authoritarian beliefs.

The investigation of the relationships between the PMS scores required to calculate the Kendall correlation coefficient between the total score of the parental traditionalism and the progressive one obtaining a coefficient of $-.262$, significant at the threshold of $p < .005$, which means that there is a reversed negative correlation of the traditionalist and progressive type of beliefs related to the rearing and education of children (when the traditionalist beliefs are strong, the modernist ones are weaker).

The approach concerning the total score of the PMS in terms of differentiation according to the subjects' gender results in a series of comparisons and relations that are based on the analysis of the average and standard deviation of total amount of traditional beliefs and of the ranks assigned to score values that express the traditional beliefs level. Investigating these data we can conclude that there is a significant difference between men and women, $Z = -3.189$, $p = .001$, confirming in this way the fact that men have a higher level of traditional beliefs related to child rearing and education than women.

Taking into account the fact that the adult subjects are fathers it has been analysed the relationship between the children's gender, parents' gender and the level of traditional beliefs. In this case also a statistically significant difference was highlighted between the male subjects and the female ones, but only in the case of the boys, $Z = -2.649$, $p = .008$, because the coefficient value $Z = -1.905$, obtained for the girls, is not statistically significant ($p = .057$).

Therefore, it can be said that the male parent (the father) of the boys is more traditionalist than the female parent in as far as the rearing and education of the children are concerned. It has been also studied the relationship between the level of education of the adult subjects (secondary school education, high school education, higher education) and the type of attitudes towards the child rearing and education, the results highlighting significant differences between the three education conditions for each type of attitude. Thus, for the progressive attitudes it was obtained a value of $\chi^2(2) = 13.309$, $p = .001$, for the traditionalist ones $\chi^2(1) = 78.370$, $p < .005$ and for those traditionalist expressed by the total score of $\chi^2(2) = 87.449$, $p < .005$.

In the case of subjects with secondary school education it has been remarked higher levels of traditional beliefs than in the case of participants with high school education, $Z_1 = -2.787$, $p = .005$ and $Z_2 = -3.060$, $p = .002$, the differences in as far as the progressive attitudes are concerned being statistically insignificant ($Z = -1.321$, $p = .187$). The comparative analysis of the influence of the education level upon the parental attitudes towards the child rearing and education showed higher values of the parental traditionalism obtained at the subjects with a secondary school education, than at those with a higher education, $Z_1 = -7.402$, $p < .005$, respectively $Z_2 = -7.818$, $p < .005$, significant differences being recorded between the two variables and for the scale of progress ($Z = -3.293$, $p = .001$). The subjects with higher education have demonstrated more powerful progressive attitudes than those with high school studies $Z = -2.463$ being statistically significant at $p = .014$, the traditional attitudes being expressed more pithily by the parents whose educational level is the high school; $Z_1 = -6.745$, $p < .005$, respectively $Z_2 = -7.101$, $p < .005$.

DISCUSSIONS

The parental beliefs relating to the rearing and education of children are influenced by the participants' gender and level of education. The more the individual's level of the education is high, the more the beliefs and attitudes towards the rearing and education of the children are progressive. The knowledge, the learning experiences, the learning environment facilitate the acquisition of information and the assessment, interpretations and manifestations which offer the possibility of training and development of more modern concepts, at the expense of the traditionalist ones, especially through the understanding of both their positive and negative aspects. The gender differences noted in terms of the nature of parental beliefs confirm and emphasize, at the same time, the previous results by highlighting fathers' traditionalism, especially in the situation when the child is male. We can argue the existence of parental beliefs, attitudes and educational practices differentiated according to both parents' and child's gender. The parents who have high levels of traditionalist beliefs values the children's conformism mostly, their behaviour must be conducted by the person/ persons regarded as "authority" in the family or in the educational institutions. By contrast, the parental progressive attitudes and beliefs stress the active role of the child in his own psycho-social development, valuing the imagination, the curiosity, the initiative and other issues which will contribute to the cognitive, affective and social development of the child. Although most of child's development theories put

special emphasis on the active role of the child in his own psycho-social development and on the major influence of the social environment in general, and of the parental environment in particular, it seems that at the level of parental attitudes and beliefs relating to the rearing and education of children psycho-pedagogical measures are necessary to be taken in order to facilitate the adaptation and the psycho-social integration of the child.

REFERENCES

1. Bandura, A., Caprara, G.V., Barbaranelli, C., Regalia, C., & Scabini, E. (2011). Impact of family efficacy beliefs on quality of family functioning and satisfaction with family life. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 60, 421–448.
2. Bussey, K., & Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106, 676-713.
3. Fagot, B.I., & Hagan, R. (1991). Observations of parent reactions to sex-stereotyped behaviors: Age and sex effects. *Child Development*, 62, 617- 628.
4. Hayden-McPeak, C., Gaskin, S.T., & Gaughan, L.K. (1993). *Bad Boys, Good Girls: A Review of the Research on Gender Differences in Preschoolers and a Reexamination of Assessment*. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, San Antonio, TX.
5. Joussemet, M., Koestner, R., Lekes, N., & Landry, R. (2005). A longitudinal study of the relationship of maternal autonomy support to children's adjustment and achievement in school. *Journal of Personality*, 73, 1215-1235.
6. Langlois, J.H., & Downs, A.C. (1980). Mothers, fathers, and peers as socialization agents of sex-typed play behaviors in young children. *Child Development*, 51, 1237-1247.