Moral-judgement and moral-practices of working children in India and the influence of paternal disciplinary attitudes

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Abstract

Eighty-five working and eighty non-working children were studied for moral judgement and moral practices. Their fathers were studied for disciplinary attitude. t-test, Pearson's correlation and Stepwise Multiple Regression analysis were used. Non-working children were high on moral judgement and moral practices whereas fathers of working children were high on disciplinary attitude. Moral practices were negatively associated to paternal disciplinary attitude amongst working children. Dimensions of paternal disciplinary attitude showed important relationships with moral judgement and moral practices in both the groups. Age, gender and certain dimensions of disciplinary attitude significantly predicted moral judgement and moral practices amongst working children. Results have been discussed in the light of working children's life circumstances and workplace environment. Possible social policy implications of the findings have been suggested.

Keywords*: Paternal disciplinary practices; moral judgement; moral practices; working children (child labor).*

Paternal influence on their off springs is a theme which has attracted researchers' interest during the last few decades (Cabrera, et al, 2000). Researchers have seriously discussed the level of influence parents employ on their children and its outcomes (Flouri, Buchanan and Bream, 2002; Collins et. al., 2000; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Harris, 1998). Socialization of children is one such aspect which the parents influence (Baumrind, 1983; Bugental & goodnow, 1998; Hoffman, 1970a, 1975; Maccoby, 1992).

In modern times, parental influence has been studied as a domain specific phenomenon (Kochanska, Aksan & Nicholas, 2003), suggesting domains viz. moral, conventional, prudential and personal socialization (Smetana, 1997). Amongst them the socialization standpoint has been widely used as a measure of effectiveness of parental discipline (Hoffman, 1970).

Researchers suggest that parental disciplinary methods traditionally include rewards to reinforce good behaviours and punishment for unacceptable ones. Punishment for misbehaviors includes verbal disapproval, an unhappy look, ignoring a particular behaviour, temporary removal of a privilege and corporal punishment in varying degree. Although rewards are more effective (Leung, Robson, & Lim, 1992) but punitive child rearing practices, verbal as well as physical are also found effective in some way (Hemenway, Solnick, & Carter, 1994). Parents, particularly fathers, being powerful figures in the family, become focus of the impact while shaping a child's behaviour through disciplinary practices (DeRoma, Lassiter, Davis, 2004). In order to ascertain the effectiveness of their discipline, parents are more inclined towards corporal punishment over alternate methods of discipline (Wiehe, 1990). Physical punishment meted out to children, however, is partially responsible for certain social problems amongst children (Smith & Mosby, 2003).

Modes of discipline amongst parents vary considerably across cultures, societies and they change with the time (Abney, 1996, Straus, 1994). Disciplinary practices, standardized at some early times, may be judged as harsh and unacceptable in a contemporary scenario (Konstantareas and Desbois, 2001). This variation in practices is generally due to the change in attitudes towards selection of a mode by the parents. Parents manifest attitudes such as endorsing the efficacy of physical punishment (Gelles, 1997; Milner & Dopke, 1997; Straus, 1994) or preference of power-assertive, commanding discipline when children break things or violate social conventions, but reasoning or inductive discipline when children make insensitive comments or violate moral principles (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, 1985). These variations are mediated by cultural / sub-cultural influences, context of the issue (Fatma et. al., 1998), and childhood history of parents having experienced certain kind of discipline (Rodriguez & Sutherland, 1999). Since parents react differently to boys and girls (Tasch, 1955) gender as well as age of the child may also be associated with mode and intensity of discipline they receive (Wolfe, 1987, Gelles, 1997). Overall parenting practices are largely influenced by child characteristics and the demands and stresses children provoke (Belsky & Vondra, 1991).

One of the most important behavioural dimensions which are shaped through parental discipline is that of moral development of a child (Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967;   Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; Kerr et al, 2004). It is manifested through a child's capacity of moral judgement and actual moral practices (Faruquie, 2002). Moral judgement is a decision in the face of any moral dilemma which involves the consideration of the ethics of various courses of action and weighing of costs and benefits to the actor, the beneficiary, and the social order (Gelfand and Hartmann, 1980). It is an aspect of the overalll moral development which evolves in a child through invariant gradual recognition of social rules and developing sense of justice (Kohlberg, 1958, Piaget, 1932, 1965). Thus, moral judgement is the cognitive capacity to perceive the relationship between an abstract principle and an actual behaviour and to judge the behaviour as right or wrong, good or bad (Sinha and Verma, 1972). Moral practice refers to the actual practice of those behaviours which have been internalised as good and appropriate through the process of moral judgement (Faruquie, 2002, Faruquie & Ahmad, 2002).

Social learning theorists describe father's role in moral development via identification (Hoffman, 1970a, Lamb, 1976) in the sense that fathers, who had a positive approach to childrearing had sons who identified with them and displayed an internalised morality (Hoffman, 1966, 1970b, 1971, Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). Grief, (1973) in this connection found significant influence of father's presence on moral development particularly of boys. It is influenced, however, by the cognitive system in the sense that children perceive parental child-rearing methods and empathy, which facilitate pro-social and moral development (Janssens, Gerris & Janssen, 1990). On the other hand negative or enforcing tactics like power

assertion on the part of parents predicted less mature moral internalisation (Kochanska, Aksan & Nichols, 2003). It is worth noting that influence of paternal discipline is mediated by age and gender of the child. Sorbring and Palmerus (2004) report that harsher discipline methods, such as behaviour modification, physical restraint and physical punishment, relate to stronger beliefs about the importance of age and gender in situations which need disciplining. Such influences on moral development through parental discipline have also been mediated by age, social class, education of parents (Saraswathi, Sunderasen & Saxena, 1980, Saraswathi & Verma, 1976) and family background which a child represents (Singh, 1981, Saraswathi, Sunderasen & Saxena, 1980).

Purpose of the study and research questions:
The purpose of this study was to assess the levels of moral judgement and actual moral practices of working children. Furthermore, disciplinary attitude of their fathers was also assessed and its impact was studied on working children's system of morality. The group of working children were compared with a group of non-working children on all the measured parameters. Following two broad research questions were evolved and examined.

1. What is the status of moral judgement, actual moral practices and paternal disciplinary attitude of working and non-working children and how both the groups differ on these dimensions?

2. Does paternal disciplinary attitudes moderate moral judgement and moral practice of the children?

METHOD

Subjects:
One hundred sixty five male as well as female children and their fathers were interviewed for this study. Roughly half of these (n = 85) were working children age ranging from 8 to 14 years conforming with the ILO's norm of the age of a child labour suggested by International Labour Organization (Gzootaert and Kanbur, 1995). These working children were employed in non-organised settings such as lock factories, brassware, motor garages, roadside small hotels, and as domestic helps. Another group of 80 non-working children falling in the same age group and their fathers were interviewed. Informed consent was taken from the children and their fathers.

Tools used:
Moral Judgement Test:

Moral Judgement Test developed by Sinha and Verma (1968) which is based on the cognitive moral development theories of Jean Piaget (1932) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1968) was used. This test has been constructed for use with Indian children and based on fourteen positive and negative moral concepts (virtues and vices) prevalent in Indian culture. The seven positive moral concepts or virtues are Ahimsa (non-violence), sense of duty, respect, purity, forgiveness, punya (merit) and truth. Seven negative moral concepts or vices are betrayal of faith, greed, anger, lie, revenge, stealing and sin. The test consists of a number of items on which the subjects had to take moral decisions, group moral contexts in the statements, work out the relationship between words with moral connotation, evaluate a given piece of action, use logical reasoning in moral problems and select the appropriate definitions of the moral values. Authors using split-half method had adjudged reliability of the test to be 0.93. Prior use of this test with working children (Faruquie & Ahmad, 2002, Faruquie, 2002) led to some modifications to make it appropriate for the population of working children.

Moral Practice Test:

In order to test the actual practice of moral concepts which the subjects knew and judged, this test was developed using rational-theoretical approach. There were seven items which were based on seven distinct dimensions of morality viz, respect of older, control over telling a lie, control over deception, control over stealing, control over anger, control over revenge and control over greed. The questionnaire intended to enquire subjects' actual practice of these moral behaviours in their daily lives. Questionnaire was to be administered to parents, employers or peers of the subjects who closely knew their behaviour.

Paternal disciplinary attitude scale (Indian context):

In the absence of an appropriate scale to measure paternal disciplinary attitude of the target group a scale was developed which had seven distinct dimensions each focussing on the paternal disciplinary behaviour namely *punishment, suppression of aggression, irritability, strictness, suppression of sexuality, suppression of affection* and *forcing independence.* Items were reduced using principal component analysis and were subsequently analysed. Item analysis (Guilford, 1954) of overall scale yielded the correlation coefficient of .692 (N = 165) indicating reasonable level of internal consistency.

Procedure:
Children and their fathers were interviewed for moral judgement and disciplinary attitudes respectively. For moral practice test, employers, peers or parents of the subjects were interviewed. Information were coded / scored and organised in a computer spreadsheet.

Analysis
Student's t-test was applied to compare means of various groups on the study variables. Relationships were studied using Carl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. Significance of difference of correlations was also carried out. Analyses were conducted using SPSS software.

RESULTS

Samples of working and non-working children were compared with each other on different study variables such as moral judgement (MJ), moral practice (MP), paternal disciplinary attitude (PDA) and its components viz. punishment (Pmt), suppression of aggression (Sag), irritability (Ir), strictness (St), suppression of sexuality (Ss), suppression of affection (Saf) and forcing independence (Fi). Results of the analysis have been reported in the following tables.

Tables 1a – 1b: Showing difference between the groups of working and non-working on moral judgement and moral practices
Table: 1a

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Moral Judgement	Non-working	80	28.09	4.12	9.011	<.001
	Working	85	22.02	4.50		

Table: 1b

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Moral Practices	Non-working	80	16.76	2.69	8.331	<.001
	Working	85	12.89	3.23		

An observation of the above tables indicates statistically significant difference between working and non-working children on both the dimensions of morality. These results clearly show that the knowledge of moral concepts and their actual practice is higher amongst non-working children in comparison to their working counterparts. To look at the status of paternal disciplinary attitude, we refer to the tables 2a to 2h that follow:

Tables 2a – 2h: Showing difference between the groups of working and non-working on paternal disciplinary attitude and its dimensions

Table: 2a

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Paternal Disciplinary Attitude	Non-working	80	45.99	4.93	-5.970	<.001
	Working	85	51.54	6.81		

Table: 2b

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Physical Punishment	Non-working	80	5.08	1.62	-8.743	<.001
	Working	85	7.66	2.12		

Table: 2c

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Suppression of Aggression	Non-working	80	7.28	2.14	3.578	<.001
	Working	85	6.02	2.34		

Table: 2d

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Irritability	Non-working	80	5.64	2.13	-7.840	<.001
	Working	85	8.49	2.52		

Table: 2e

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Strictness	Non-working	80	7.08	2.06	1.047	.297
	Working	85	6.72	2.31		

Table: 2f

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Suppression of Sexuality	Non-working	80	7.06	2.60	-.837	.404
	Working	85	7.39	2.40		

Table: 2g

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Suppression of Affection	Non-working	80	5.36	1.71	-4.488	<.001
	Working	85	6.73	2.16		

Table: 2h

	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	t	p
Forcing Independence	Non-working	80	8.50	2.17	-.081	.935
	Working	85	8.53	2.45		

Above tables show that disciplinary attitude of the fathers of working children is higher in comparison to non-working children. Both the samples indicate mixed trend on various dimensions of paternal disciplinary attitude. Fathers of the working children have significantly higher level of attitude towards punishment, irritability and suppression of affection. On the other hand, fathers of non-working children possess statistically higher level of attitudes towards suppression of aggression. Both the groups are statistically equal on strictness, suppression of sexuality and forcing independence.

In order to study the associations between the study variables, correlation analysis within both groups was conducted independently. Correlation values for both the groups have been presented in the tables 3a and 3b.

Table: 3a
Showing Pearson's Correlation coefficient values in working group
(Showing significant relationships only)

Sr. no.	Relationship	r	Sig.
1.	Paternal Disciplinary attitude – Moral Practice	-.642	.01
2.	Punishment – Moral Practice	-.902	.01
3.	Irritability - Moral Practice	-.643	.01
4.	Forcing independence - Moral Judgement	.253	.05
5.	Age – Moral Judgement	.375	.01

An observation of table 3a reveals that overall scores of paternal disciplinary attitude have some negative bearing on actual moral practices of working children. Major contributors in this phenomenon are punishment and irritability, both influence moral practices in similar way. However, fathers' attitude towards forcing independence is positively associated with moral judgement. Moral judgement capacity increases with age as both have a positive association.

Table: 3b
Showing Pearson's Correlation coefficient values in non-working group
(Showing significant relationships only)

Sr. no.	Relationship	r	Sig.
1.	Moral Practice – Moral Judgement	399	.01
2.	Suppression of Aggression - Moral Judgement	.366	.01
3.	Irritability - Moral Judgement	-.371	.01
4.	Strictness - Moral Judgement	.321	.01
5.	Suppression of Affection – Moral Judgement	-.487	.01
6.	Forcing Independence - Moral Judgement	.431	.01
7.	Punishment - Moral Practice	-.269	.05

8.	Suppression of Aggression - Moral Practice	.576	.01
9.	Irritability - Moral Practice	-.713	.01
10.	Strictness - Moral Practice	.393	.01
11.	Forcing Independence - Moral Practice	.333	.01

Non-working children have better association between their moral judgement and moral practices, indicating proper internalisation of morality. Their moral judgement is influenced by various dimensions of paternal disciplinary attitude both positively and negatively. Suppression of aggression, strictness and forcing independence have positive association whereas irritability and suppression of affection have negative association with the moral judgement of non-working children.

Moral practice of non-working children is also influenced by different factors of paternal disciplinary attitude in positive as well as negative manner. Punishment and irritability negatively influence whereas ssuppression of aggression, strictness and forcing independence positively influence moral practices of non-working children.

An observation of relationships reported in above tables indicates some relationships to be common to both the groups. These common relationships have been further analysed by finding significance of difference between them.

Table 3c: showing significance of difference between coefficient of correlation found common in the groups of working and non-working children

Relationship	Coefficient of correlation (r)		Critical ratio	Sig.
	Non-working (n=80)	Working (n=85)		
Punishment – Moral Practice	-.269	-.902	3.956	.01
Irritability - Moral Practice	-.713	-.643	0.437	n.s.
Forcing independence - Moral Judgement	.333	.253	0.50	n.s.

Significance of difference between the coefficients of two groups indicates that relationship between punishment and moral practice is far stronger in the working group in comparison to non-working group. Though both values of correlation are significant but a high critical value indicates high level of paternal attitude towards the punishment in working group and resultant decline in moral practice of this group.

DISCUSSION:

Our findings indicate clear difference between the groups of working and non-working children on moral judgement and moral practices in the sense that working children are inferior on both the dimensions of morality. As we have pointed out earlier, the development of morality amongst children has been a topic of discussion amongst the researchers. Be it intuition or 'gut feelings' (Haidt, 2001), a socio-cultural aspect (Vygotsky, 1978) or a developmental-stage based process which occurs naturally in a particular predictable pattern (Kohlberg, 1958 Piaget, 1932), it is sure to be affected by certain factors such as physical abuse (Faruquie, 2002).

Working children function in an environment which is totally different from home and family. This environment is generally full of exploitation, verbal and emotional abuse, demoralising experiences and frustrations (Faruquie, 2002). This leads to a confused and derailed moral internalisation which has been manifested in their performance. Miltenberg and Singer (2000) in this connection suggested that children developing in socially unhealthy and traumatic environment manifest moral confusion and insoluble moral dilemmas for some certain moral problems. It applies to our sample and we can safely say that working children's workplace culture slowly but surely interferes with the expected, normal status of moral internalisation amongst children and changes it to somewhat altered form.

An important revelation is that working children though able to understand and judge moral values, do not practice them at similar levels. The socially unhealthy environment in which they work, poses before them various threats and challenges. To cope with such an unfriendly environment the child follows strategies which he finds effective. These strategies are either immoral acts or they help to develop immorality. Generally, working children face employers' and parents' wrath in the form of physical punishment. In order to avoid such situations, children prefer to tell a lie, to deceive, and engage in other such immoral strategies which become a habitual characteristic of their lives. Present situation fits the premise established by Shwedar & Much (1987) in their Social Communication Theory which states, "Development of social knowledge is not based mainly on self-construction, but on other dependent learning". According to Shwedar & Much, morality is acquired by children through communication of cultural judgements and ideologies. Specifically, moral evaluations and judgements are transmitted to children by local guardians such as parents, employers and senior workers etc who are a part of moral order Eckensberger and Zimba (1997) noted that Shweder's emphasis on moral principles is based on various cultural conceptions of persons, society, morality and nature and the relation amongst these. Since a working child learns various behaviours particularly deliberate immorality, while fitting himself in morally bad circumstances or with stressful situations or company, it mainly depends on other based learning as well as the context of the situation. Shwedar et. al. (1987) have explained internalisation of morality with reference to context-dependent and context-independent obligations which are labelled as other based learning.

Another equally important finding of this research is the difference in the disciplinary attitude of fathers of working and non-working children in the sense that fathers of working children have stronger disciplinary attitude in comparison to the fathers of non-working children. However, on different dimensions of disciplinary attitude, the results are in mixed form. Fathers of non-working children are higher on 'suppression of aggression' whereas, they are comparatively lower on 'physical punishment', 'irritability' and 'suppression of affection'. This variant trend indicates cultural influence on the disciplinary preference amongst the fathers of working and non-working children.

Our major objective of the present research was to find out whether the disciplinary attitude of the fathers casts any influence on the moral judgement and moral practices. Our results indicate an association between paternal disciplinary attitudes and dimensions of morality in the sense that an increase in the paternal disciplinary attitude results in the reduction of moral practices of working children. Particularly, two dimensions of disciplinary attitude i. e. 'physical punishment' and 'irritability' negatively influence the moral practices. However, the dimension of 'forcing independence' is positively associated with moral practice in working children. These results are indicative of the fact that power assertion and implementing methods of discipline may be perceived by the parents as corrective measures but have negative behavioural effects (Chang et.al., 2003) including moral conduct (Kochanska, Aksan & Nichols, 2003). Similar trend is observed amongst non-working children where physical punishment and irritability are negatively associated with both the

dimensions of morality. The dimension of forcing independence in this group is also positively associated with both the dimensions of morality. Overall, different disciplinary attitudes provide different outcomes towards the dimension of morality. The strongest association, though similar, but remarkably different in terms of strength across the groups of working and non-working children is a negative association between physical punishment and moral practices. These findings are similar to the findings of Kochanska, Aksan and Nichols (2003) who found parental power assertion to be associated with behavioural outcome, and not to be associated with cognitive outcome. The only difference is that behavioural outcome is analogous to moral practice and cognitive outcome is analogous to moral judgement in our research.

Since many countries have banned corporal punishment in families and schools, and such a move has been widely supported by the international humanitarian organisations, findings of this research could be placed for discussion amongst experts of family systems. This study provides empirical support to various researchers as well as advocates of well-being of children representing low socio-economic stratum.

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