

Socialization Process of Adolescents in Nuclear Families with Single Child and More Than One Child in Kerala

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Abstract

Social norm favouring small family emerged in Kerala by the second half of the twentieth century. Birth rates have fallen as parents want fewer children. Today majority of couples have two or less than two children and among them a portion are having single child family. Family size and socialization of the children are related. In earlier period families have larger number of children and they socialized as a group pulsating with interaction. In a Single child family, the situation is different. The single child is the first and last child and so is the only chance at parenting the parents get. Under contemporary conditions, socialization within the family refers primarily to interaction between parents and their children. The general objective of the study was to analyze the socialization process of adolescents in nuclear families with single child and more than one child. The specific objectives were to understand the adolescents' pattern of interaction and nature of relationship with parents. The study was conducted among 50 adolescent children (between the age groups 11-18yrs) each from single child families and the nuclear families with more than one child in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation in Kerala. Based on the frame work of the Symbolic Interaction theory of socialization by George Herbert Mead, the study proposes that adolescents derive meanings from the interaction with parents in the family to establish relationship. Since majority of them consider both parents as the significant persons in the life, the study could conclude that adolescents under study in general are having close relation with both parents.

Key Words: single child, single child family, nuclear family, socialization process, nuclear family with more than one child.

Introduction

Kerala, the South western State in India has achieved a fertility decline level which is comparable to that of developed nations. Until a few years ago the state had the highest population growth rate in the country. In the second half of the 1960s, family planning began to have an impact on these rates (Zakariah & Rajan, 1997). By 1970's this rate began to fall largely to the lowest level in India. The State is currently having sub- replacement level fertility (Nair, 2010). Thus Kerala has a leading role in the history of demographic transition in India. The developments in public health, universal education, increase in the number of surviving children, higher cost of education and child rearing, higher literacy, higher female education etc. are pointed out as the main factors (Zakariah & Rajan, 1997). Historical factors such as Matriline, Maharajas and Missionaries had a great role in this transformation (Nair, 2010). In other words a social norm favouring small family emerged in Kerala by the second half of the twentieth century. Thus a close study of the situation in Kerala would show that family planning has been accepted as a way of life. Today majority of them have two or less than two children and among them a portion are having single child family.

Declining birth-rates not only change the position of children in society as a whole but they can also affect the status of children in individual families. An important change would take place in family environments of children. Concomitant with the small family norm the parent- child relation in the family has been undergoing changes. Parents are the most important agents of socialization. Families are formative. They shape the growing child who partly develops in response to the particular dynamics and circumstances of the household. So the shaping influences of different types of families need to be focused. The outcomes of these influences begin to appear during adolescence when the young person has separated from childhood and begins developing the individual and independent characteristics that will mark them as an adult (Benokraitis, 2011).

Adolescence is a period of tremendous change. Teenagers are establishing their own identity and testing their autonomy as they mature and break away from parental supervision, a healthy process in human development. The concept of adolescence as a period of storms and stress was initiated by G. Stanley Hall of Clark University in the U.S.A in the beginning of 20th century. Thus the psychological upheaval during this stage is often emphasized. A good parent - child relationship may shift suddenly during adolescence. Under contemporary conditions, socialization within the family refers primarily to interaction between parents and their children. Glick (1977) says that "the larger the family the large proportion of time that children are likely to spend interacting with each other, whereas smaller the family, the

greater proportion of times the children are likely to spend interacting with their parents..." (Goode,1983). But whatever change has taken place in the relations between parents and children, it has some sociological implications.

Psycho analytical theories argued that children's experiences in early life are formative for their later personality and emotional development. (Adler, 1964, as cited in Falbo & Polit, 1986). Hence absence of siblings is considered to be a detrimental factor in the personality development and sociability of the single child. Tseng et al. (1988, as cited in Yang, Ollendick, Dong, Xia and Li, 1995) compared the behaviour problem profiles of a large sample of children who were their parents' only children and those who had siblings. Boys who were only children did not differ significantly from boys who had siblings in their profile of behaviour problems. However, girls who were only children received significantly higher ratings on the depression and moody factors than girls with siblings. Such a pattern might be expected based on the traditional Chinese preference for more than one child, especially a son, and particularly in rural settings.

Trent and Spitze (2011) examined the social behavior, particularly the social activities, of adults with and without siblings. Group differences in the frequency of engagement in social activities with relatives and non-relatives, types of social participation, and whether social activities between the two groups of adults vary by age, gender, and parents' marital history were examined. Compared to adults who grew up with siblings, adults who grew up without siblings have significantly less frequent social activities with relatives, and the difference is greater among those who did not live with both biological parents growing up. According to Hou (2009), from one perspective single children are the shining stars receiving sufficient care and resources in their families who give them a strong sense of self-determination and self-confidence. From another point of view they are developing a self-centered character that gives them a bad name for being unable to accept critique and tolerate differing opinions. They were also reported to be with less perseverance and patience since almost everything is relatively easy for them to achieve.

A case study of the consequences of one-child families in urban Dalian in China conducted by Hou (2009) analyzed the parenting practices in one child family and it was revealed that parents invest a lot of time, energy and money to train and educate a 'perfect one child' and for that many of them adopt western, scientific childrearing practices. The study also found that the urban single girl children are more empowered in family as well as in society than their counterparts with siblings. Falbo and Polit (1986) also found that enhanced parental attention probably aids the child acquiring more sophisticated intellectual skills such as vocabulary, as well as more mature behavior patterns. It was also found that during family meals, one-

child families engaged in more parent-child conversations with more information exchange than did families with two or three children (as cited in Falbo & Polit, 1986). Thus various studies suggest about considerable variation in the nature of socialization process of adolescents in families with single child and more than one child. As the present Kerala society is having a sizeable number of nuclear families with single child as well as more than one child, the present study was undertaken.

Objectives

The general objective of the study was to analyze the socialization process of adolescents in nuclear families with single child and more than one child. The specific objectives were to understand the adolescents' pattern of interaction and nature of relationship with parents.

In the present study the term Socialization means the pattern of interaction and nature of relationship of adolescents under study with their parents in the family. The term adolescent refers to an individual in the age group of 11-18 years. Here the term nuclear family connotes to a unit composed of father, mother and unmarried children. The term Single child is used in the study to refer to the only off spring who is a boy or a girl in the age group of 11-18 years, living with both parents in Thiruvananthapuram corporation. Further, nuclear family with more than one child indicates the nuclear families with two or three children.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on the Symbolic Interaction Theory of socialization by George Herbert Mead. Turner (2004) has given a description of the theory of symbolic interactionism by George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) as follows. G.H Mead borrowed ideas from others and synthesized these with his own insights to form modern interactionism specifically symbolic interactionism. Mead was mainly influenced by the concept of 'social self' suggested by William James, Looking Glass Self' by Charles Horton Cooley and Pragmatism by John Dewey. He also accepted the basic premise of Behaviourism (reinforcement guides and directs action), and Darwinian principles. Thus according to Mead, mind, self and other unique features of humans evolve out of the process of coping, adjusting, adapting, and achieving the ultimate gratification or reinforcement: Survival. Thus Mead developed a theory of mind, self, and society which is linked to the process of social interaction using symbols. For Mead society is that constructed pattern of coordinated activity that are maintained by and changed through symbolic interactionism which facilitates role taking and self-assessment process of individuals. This broad conceptual portrait of linkages between individual and society emphasize that society shapes mind and self, whereas mind and self-affect society.

Method

All nuclear families with either single child or more than one child in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, Kerala comprise the universe of the study. An adolescent between the age group 11-18 years who belongs to nuclear family either with single child or with more than one child in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation constitutes the unit of the study. Sample constituted 100 adolescents selected from nuclear families (50 each from nuclear families with single child and with more than one child) in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation in Kerala using purposive sampling method. Interview Schedule was the tools used in the study. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used in this study. The primary data was collected from the respondents through interview Schedule. The secondary data for the study was collected from articles, journals, books, news paper and websites. Independent variable in the study was number of children in the family and dependent variables were discussion of matters regarding bodily developments with parents and occurrence of Punishment

Analysis and Findings

i) Personal Profile

The study firstly analyzed the personal profile of the respondents. Regarding the gender composition of the respondents, among the adolescents in the single child family, girls constituted higher percentage (58%) and among the adolescents in nuclear family with more than one child; boys were higher in percentage (52%). Age composition showed that among the single children, higher percentage (44%) was between the age group 15-16 whereas among the other category, the age groups 11-12 and 15-16 constituted the higher percentage (28%). Analysis of the educational profile of the respondents revealed that, higher numbers of respondents were studying in 11-12th standard in both categories. Regarding the type of educational institutions 31% were studying in private aided schools, 17 per cent in unaided schools and 2% were in Government schools in the case of the single children. The distribution was 22 per cent, 25 per cent and 2 per cent respectively in the other category. Among the single children, higher percentage (50%) was Hindus, followed by Christians (32%) and Muslims (18%). In the second category, Christians constituted 54 per cent followed by Hindus (40%) and Muslims (6%). Majority of the respondents were belonging to general category among the both groups. Analysis of the place of residence showed that, majority of the respondents in both cases were residents of rural area. Distribution of the data regarding the academic performance of the respondents showed that majority had average level performance in both categories.

ii) Pattern of Interaction with Parents

Regarding the opportunities to interact with parents among both groups, a high majority had the opportunity to interact with both parents. Further, this opportunity was more among the single children. Regarding the opportunity to share jokes with parents, among the single children, 10 per cent of them shared with father, 26 per cent with mothers, and 58 per cent with both parents and the rest 6 per cent were not sharing. In the other category the distribution of the number of respondents was 14, 22, 54 and 10 per cent respectively.

Table No. 1

Time Spend With Father

Sl. No.	Time with Father	Single Child		More than one child	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	½ an hour	9	18%	11	22%
2.	1hour	12	24%	16	32%
3.	2 hour	11	22%	11	22%
4.	More than 2 hrs	14	28%	12	24%
5.	Nil	4	8%	0	0

From the table it was clear that higher number of single children spend more than 2 hours with father (28%) and among children with siblings higher number of respondents (32%) spend 1 hour with the father

Table No. 2

Time Spend With Mother

S I . No.	Time with Mother	Single Child		More than one child	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	½ an hour	6	12%	0	0
2.	1hour	5	10%	5	10%
3.	2 hour	4	8%	8	16%
4.	More than 2 hrs	34	68%	37	74%
5.	Nil	1	2%	0	0

The table shows that a high majority of the respondents in both groups spend more than 2 hours with the mother. As all the respondents spend more time with the mothers, majority of them used to disclose everything with mothers (66% in the case of single children & 68% in the adolescents with siblings). Further most of them in both categories disclosed all daily affairs with the mothers. 24 per cent of the respondents in the first category and 8 per cent of the respondents in the second category used to disclose everything to both parents.

It was found that majority of the single children had their own room than children with siblings. But most of them never spend time alone in their room. Though majority of the respondents slept alone, a sizeable number of the respondents in the second category slept with siblings. Majority of the respondents in both categories used to help their parents in minor domestic work either often or sometimes. There were a sizeable number of single children (34%) and respondents with siblings (28%) who were not having the habit of staying away from home. Further, a sizeable number of adolescents in both categories used to spend money in consultation with parents or were not having the habit of personal spending. Though a sizeable percentage of the respondents in both categories could meet their needs by asking parents, it was more adolescent children with siblings (30%) who had to wait than the single children (16%) to satisfy their needs.

Regarding the nature of behaviour with father, higher percentage had cordial behaviour with father in the case of single children (48%), whereas 48 per cent of the children with siblings had respect with father. In the case of nature of behaviour with mother a high majority had freedom (80% & 56% respectively). More than half of the single children (54%) and nearly half of the children with siblings (48%) spent their leisure time on watching Television. Music and computer games were the other choices. More than half of the single children (54%) and majority of the children with siblings (68%) used to dine together with the family members. It was more single children (34%) used to have food alone than the others (4%). Further a higher percent of the respondents used to participate in family prayer (64% & 78% respectively). 76 per cent of the single children and 88 per cent of the adolescent children with siblings agree with their parents about their future career. 54 per cent of the single children and 74 per cent of the children with siblings used to seek the consent of their parents while going out. 30 per cent of the single children and 24 per cent of the children with siblings never used to go out alone. 14 per cent of the single child and 2% of the other category sought the consent of the parents sometimes only. A great majority of the respondents used to participate in family celebrations even though the single children (74%) lagged behind children with siblings (84%) regarding this matter. 94 per cent of the respondents in both categories considered that all their needs were satisfied at home. Majority of the respondents used to select dress with their parents (82% of the single children and 74% of the

children with siblings). Though more than half of the respondents had no boredom and loneliness at home, it was children with siblings (44%) who reported to have the feeling of boredom more than single children (22%). 64 per cent of the single children and 72 per cent of the children with siblings were reported to be able to cope up with the situational changes in life

iii) Nature of Relationship with Parents

For both single children and children with siblings, mother was the most caring person in the family (50% & 60% respectively) and father was selected by 8% in the first category and 12% in the second category. However it was more single children who reported caring of both parents (40%) than the other group (26%).

Table No. 3

Discussion of Important Matters by Parents

Sl. No.	Discussion of important matters	Single Child		More than one child	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	18	36%	26	52%
2.	Sometimes	28	56%	16	32%
3.	Never	4	8%	7	14%

From the table it was clear that children from nuclear families with sibling were having more frequent discussion of important family matters with their parents (52%); whereas 56% of the single children had discussion sometimes. Regarding the matters of bodily development, it is revealed that more than half of the respondents (66 per cent among the single children and 68 per cent among the respondents with siblings) had discussion with mother. Discussion with both parents was reported by 9 per cent in the first category and 27 per cent in the second category. In the Chi-square analysis of the variables number of children in the family and discussion of matters regarding bodily developments with parents, the Chi-square value was 0.589 (d.f is 3) and table value was 7.815. Since the Chi-square value is less than the table value, there was no association between the number of children in the family and discussion of matters regarding bodily developments with parents.

Hence the discussion regarding bodily developments is irrespective of the number of children in the family. Mother was most concerned about studies for about half of the respondents (44% of single children & 46% of respondents with siblings) and for the other half, both parents were having the concern about the academic matters of children (46% & 44% respectively).

For more than half of the respondents both parents provided advices to correct them (58% in both categories). Mother was said to be used to give advice by 24 per cent among the single children and 14 per cent of the respondents with siblings. Nearly half of the single children (44%) were not physically punished by their parents; whereas in the case of adolescents with siblings, only twenty eight percentages were excluded from punishment by parents in the family. Among the respondents who got punishment, majority were either by mother (26 per cent in the first category and 38 per cent in the second category) or both parents (26 per cent & 22 per cent respectively). In the Chi-square analysis of the variables number of children in the family and punishment by parents, the Chi-square value was 5.7 and table value was 7.815. Since the Chi-square value is less than the table value, there was no association between adolescents from Single child family and also families with more than one child and punishment by parents. The main reasons for physical punishment were poor performance in studies and disobedience. Conflict with siblings was a major reason for punishment in the case of children with siblings. Further, majority of the respondents never felt that their parents are over concerned about their daily routines.

It was evident from the table that 42 per cent of the single children and 36 per cent of the respondents with siblings had conflict with mothers. Further 44 per cent of the single children and 30 per cent of the respondents with siblings had conflict with both parents. In majority cases these conflicts were happening once in a while. The main causes of conflicts were minor differences of opinion, poor performance in studies, over use of T. V, regarding work at home. Conflict with siblings was one of the main factors of conflicts in the case of families with siblings. Majority of the respondents opined that they accept parental decision even in the case of denial of demands. It was also revealed that more single children (34%) used to have food alone than the adolescents with siblings (4%).

Regarding the enquiry about the most significant person in life, for 72% of the single children and 60% of the children with siblings, the most significant person in life was both parents. Mother was selected by 10 per cent of single children and the other 16% selected father. Whereas, in the case of the second category of respondents, the percentages were 30 and 8 respectively.

Discussion

The institution of family existed in some form in all societies and has been regarded as the bed rock of society. In the context of declining fertility rates, families are having lesser number of children. But the number of children varies considerably in today's families with consequences in the interaction dynamics. Now, a significant number of nuclear families are single child families. There are as much nuclear families with more than one child as single child families. Demographic changes define the context within which the relationships between generations must be worked out. The present study analyzed the process of socialization of adolescents. It was a comparative study among the adolescents in single child families and nuclear families in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation in Kerala.

Pattern of Interaction with Parents

A high majority had the opportunity to interact with both parents. Further, this opportunity was more among the single children. Among single children as well as children with siblings a sizeable number could share jokes with both of the parents. Single children spend longer hours of duration with the father than the other category. Regarding the time with the mother, respondents of both groups spend considerable time with the mother. Corresponding to this, respondents in both groups were revealed to disclose personal matters with mothers.

There was no significant difference regarding the involvement in domestic works by the adolescent children of two groups and also regarding the pattern of spending money in consultation with the parents. Watching T.V, music, computer games etc. were the main leisure time activities of adolescents in both categories. But a significant number of children with siblings used to sleep with their siblings. Though a sizeable percentage of the respondents in both categories could meet their needs by asking parents, adolescent children with siblings had to wait than the single children to satisfy their needs. Regarding the behavior with the father single children had more cordial relations than children with siblings who were having more respectful dealings. It was more single children who used to have food alone than the others. Further, though majority of the adolescents were having the habit of dining together, dining alone was more among single children.

Analysis of the interaction pattern of the adolescents belonging to single child family and families with more than one child reveals close interaction with parents. However, single children are found to have more freedom in interaction.

Nature of Relationship with Parents

Mother was the most caring person and the involvement of both parents in the caring of children is higher in single child family. Involvement of both parents in the academic matters has been noticed among a sizeable number of respondents. Both parents were involved in providing advice or punishment. Compared to father, mothers were more involved in physical punishment and occurrence of punishment was slightly high in the families with more than one child. However, punishments as well as discussion of matters regarding bodily developments were not found to be associated with the number of children in the family. Conflict with sibling too was a main cause of punishment in the case of adolescents with siblings apart from the common factors such as poor performance in studies and disobedience. The study showed that role of parents and intense interaction between parents in terms of conflict is slightly higher in single child families. Minor differences of opinion, poor performance in studies were the main causes of conflict in both cases

Conclusion

Thiruvananthapuram is the capital city of Kerala. It is characterized by the presence of heterogeneous population comprising of people belonging to different religious, educational, social and cultural background even though certain pockets were inhabited by a particular group of people. People living here are educated and have easy access to the new values and governmental policies. It is one of the pioneer districts in Kerala that whole heartedly welcomed the Family Welfare Programmes. The analysis of the socialization process of adolescents in the nuclear families with single child and more than one child threw light into the familial dynamics characteristic of modern society which was totally different from the traditional family. The study showed that the presence of one or two siblings do not make much differences with single child family in the interaction pattern and relationship with parents by the adolescents.

The theoretical framework of the study proposes that, adolescents derive meanings from the interaction with parents in the family to establish relationship. Since majority of them consider both parents as the significant persons in the life, the study could conclude that adolescents under study in general are having close relation with both parents. Also both parents are seriously involved in the upbringing of children even though the involvement is more extensive in the single child family.

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