Maternal coping strategies for physically and verbally aggressive children

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to study the different studies used by rural and urban mothers to cope with childhood aggression. Total sample consisted of 120 aggressive children in the age group of 4-6years and their mothers. The results showed that in urban and rural areas, boys were more physically aggressive while girls were more verbally aggressive. In urban and rural areas, mothers of aggressive children used six different strategies to cope with physical and verbal aggression of their children.

Aggression manifests itself in child's behaviour from early years. Aggressive behaviours tend to be highly stable from early childhood to adolescence and adulthood (Waldman, 1996). In pre-school years, the childhood aggression is an important predictor of difficulties in social adjustment, delinquency (Hay *et al.*, 2000) and psychological dysfunction (McFayden-Ketchum *et al.,* 1996). Highly aggressive behaviour often occurs along and may be predictive of poor academic performance and increased risk of dropping out of school (Rubin *et al.*, 1998).

Aggression in childhood and later ages can be related to problem behaviour in future. The possibilities for intervention, to curb (may be to just an extent) aggression and violence, would surely be increased if one could identify younger children who are already showing precursors to behaviour problems.

"Aggression is that behaviour that is intended to hurt or harm others" (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). According to Baron (1985), aggression is any form of behaviour directed towards the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment. According to Crick *et al.* (1996), anger and intent to harm have been two defining features of aggression. Shaw *et al.* (2000) described early aggressive behaviour as an "act directed toward a specific other person or object with intent to hurt or frighten, for which there is a consensus about the aggressive intent of the act."

Parenting styles and child rearing practices are often linked to child's behaviour. Punishment, which is often considered a deterrent to aggressive behaviour, is an important component of parenting styles. Research gives evidence that parents of under controlled aggressive children are highly directive, intrusive and rejecting (Rubin *et al*., 1996). Not only this, they have been found to be highly punitive and critical with their children (Berk, 1994).

Mother is considered to be the most important figure for child and also forms one of most influential socialization agents in early life. Mother's beliefs about child rearing and socialization are largely reflected in her behaviour and reaction towards children.

So, keeping the above facts in view, the study on childhood aggression was taken into consideration with the objective to study the strategies used by urban and rural mothers to deal with childhood aggression.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted purposively in rural and urban areas of Hisar District of Haryana State. Urban study was conducted in Hisar city and rural study was conducted in block-II of Hisar District.

From Hisar city, three schools were selected randomly. The schools were selected through purposive convenient sampling. These schools were private English medium, co-educational, medium fee charging and catering to middle socio-economic strata. Finally a list of 60 children from Hisar city was prepared.

Similarly from rural area, three pre-schools were selected from village Kaimari. These 03 pre-schools were co-educational and private English/Hindi medium. Thus, 35 aggressive children were selected from the village Kaimari.

Sr. No.	Parameters	Retailing (n = 32)					Wholesaling (n = 8)				
Table 2 : Cost calculation of the woollen products											
		Always	Sometimes	Never	Score	Rank	Always	Sometimes	Never	Score	Rank
1.	Cost of raw material	-	-	100	1.00	V			100	1.00	III
2.	Rental work space	90.62	9.38		2.89	I	62.5	37.5	-	2.62	II
3.	Marketing expenditure	62.5	21.88	15.62	2.45	III	75.00	25.00	-	2.75	I
4.	Transportation	-	-	100	1.00	V	100	-	-	0.75	IV
5.	Maintenance	46.8	43.75	9.38	2.36	IV	62.5	9.38	-	2.62	II
6.	Electricity	84.38	15.62	-	2.84	II	100	-	-	0.75	IV

Sr. No.	Parameters	Retailing (n = 32)					Wholesaling (n = 8)				
Table 3 : Constraints faced during marketing of woollen products											
		Always	Sometimes	Never	Mean	Rank	Always	Sometimes	Never	Mean	Rank
1.	Delay in sales services due to workers	-	-	100	1.0	III	62.5	37.5	-	2.62	II
2.	High transport charges	78.13	15.62	6.25	2.71	V	25.00	12.5	25.00	2.00	IV
3.	Unavailability of the transport	-	-	100	1.00	VII	-	-	100	1.00	IV
4.	High marketing cost	93.75	6.25	-	2.93	I	62.5	37.5	-	2.62	II
5.	Price fluctuation	87.5	12.5	-	2.87	III	7.5	25.00	25.00	2.13	V
6.	Competition in the market	84.37	9.38	6.25	2.78	IV	-	-	100	1.00	VI
7.	Higher taxes	78.12	12.5	9.38	2.68	VI	-	-	100	1.00	VI
8.	Changes in Govt. policies and norms	90.62	9.38		2.90	II	12.5	25.0	25.0	2.45	III
9.	Poor quality products			100	1.00	VII	75.00	25.0	-	2.75	I

Three pre-schools were selected from village Mangali. These 03 pre-schools were co-educational and private English/Hindi medium. Thus, 25 aggressive children were selected from the village Mangali. Finally a list of 60 children from rural area was prepared.

Sixty aggressive children in the age group of 4-6 years old were taken from the various pre-schools of Hisar city and sixty from the villages. Thus, a total of 120 children was the sample size for present study. Mothers of these aggressive children were also the respondent for the study.

Tools for data collection:
Questionnaire-cum-interview schedule for mothers:
A detailed interview schedule was prepared for mothers to collect information regarding their perceptions about aggression in their children.

A set of 20 questions were prepared covering different types of aggressive behaviour shown by 4-6 years old children to know how mothers reacted in respective situation so as to see what sort of strategies were used to deal with situation when child was displaying aggression. The mother's responses were noted by the investigators. For 01 question involving 'why/why not',

the response was recorded and analyzed. The results of remaining items were then tabulated and data were analyzed to draw conclusions.

Coding scheme used by Mills and Rubin (1990) in their study on related topic, was adopted and used for coding the responses obtained while investigating maternal coping strategies for dealing with aggression in 4-6 years old children. The responses were put under 6 categories:

Structuring:
Explaining, reasoning with the child, suggesting alternatives.

Power assertion:
Punishing the child, asserting power in some way.

Psychological controlling:
Threatening, disapproving etc.

Supportive:
Comforting the child, give in to his/her demands.

No reaction:
Ignoring the behaviour, making no response to the

situation.

Varied behaviour:

Something this, something that etc.

The last category was not present in original coding scheme. This category was added by the investigators as these responses could not be put under any of originally used categories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings obtained from the present study are presented below:

Strategies used by mothers to cope with childhood aggression:

It is clear from Table 1 and Fig. 1 that in urban areas, exactly half (50%) mothers for boys and 12.05 per cent mother for girls used power assertive strategy. Hastings and Rubin (1999) stated that mothers were likely to be using more power assertive techniques when experiencing negative emotions (anger, distress) rather than confused emotions in response to their pre-school aged children. No mother had used the 'no reaction' and 'psychological controlling' strategies for their children. Only 8.33 per cent mothers for boys and 20.83 per cent mothers for girls used 'supportive' strategy while 41.67 per cent mothers for boys and 20.83 per cent mothers for girls used 'structuring' strategy. A total of 45.83 per cent mothers for girls used 'varied behaviour' strategy whereas not even a single mother was interested to use 'varied behaviour' strategy for boys. In rural areas, 46.67 per cent mothers for boys and more than half (60%) per cent mothers for girls used 'power assertion' strategy while only 11.11 per cent mothers for boys and 6.67 per cent mothers for girls used 'no reaction' strategy. Only 6.67 per cent mothers for boys and 6.67 per cent mothers for girls used 'supportive' strategy while 6.67 per cent

mothers for boys and 13.33 per cent mothers for girls used 'psychological controlling' strategy. A total of 13.33 per cent mothers for boys and 6.67 per cent mothers for girls used 'structuring' strategy whereas 15.56 per cent mothers for boys and 6.67 per cent mothers for girls used 'varied behaviour' strategy.

In urban and rural areas, respectively, 35 per cent and half (50 per cent) mothers used 'power assertion' strategy while 10 per cent mothers in rural areas used 'no reaction' strategy. No mother in urban areas used 'no reaction' strategy. Only 13.33 per cent and 6.67 per cent mothers in urban and rural areas, respectively used 'supportive' strategy whereas 8.33 per cent mothers from rural areas used 'psychological controlling' strategy. Not even a single mother used 'psychological controlling' strategy from urban areas. A total of 33.33 per cent and 11.67 per cent mothers from urban and rural areas, respectively used 'structuring' strategy whereas 18.33 per cent and 13.33 per cent mothers used 'varied behaviour' strategy, respectively.

It is clear from Table 2 and Fig. 2 that in urban areas, 25 per cent mothers for boys and 8.33 per cent mothers for girls used 'power assertion' strategy whereas only 5.56 per cent mothers for boys used 'no reaction' strategy. No mother for girls was interested in 'no reaction' strategy. Only 19.44 per cent mothers for boys used 'supportive' strategy. Not even a single mother for girls used 'supportive' strategy. Only 19.44 mothers for boys and 25 per cent mothers for girls used 'psychological controlling' strategy whereas 8.33 per cent mothers for boys and 50 per cent mothers for girls used 'structuring' strategy. Only 22.22 per cent mothers for boys and 16.67 per cent mothers for girls used 'varied behaviour' strategy.

A total of 18.33 per cent and 30 per cent mothers from urban and rural areas, respectively used 'power assertion' strategy whereas 3.33 per cent and 6.67 per cent mothers used 'no reaction' strategy, respectively.

Table 1: Strategies used by mothers to cope with physical aggression (n=120)						
Variables	Power assertion	No reaction	Supportive	Psychological controlling	Structuring	Varied behaviour	Total n=60
Urban						
Boys	18 (50.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	15 (41.67)	0 (0.00)	36 (60.00)
Girls	3 (12.05)	0 (0.00)	5 (20.83)	0 (0.00)	5 (20.83)	11 (45.83)	24 (40.00)
Total	21 (35.00)	0(0.00)	8 (13.33)	0 (0.00)	20 (33.33)	11 (18.33)	60 (100.00)
Rural						
Boys	21 (46.67)	5 (11.11)	3 (6.67)	3 (6.67)	6 (13.33)	7 (15.56)	45 (75.00)
Girls	9 (60.00)	1 (6.67)	1 (6.67)	2 (13.33)	1 (6.67)	1 (6.67)	15 (25.00)
Total	30 (50.00)	6 (10.00)	4 (6.67)	5 (8.33)	7 (11.67)	8 (13.33)	60(100.00)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage to the respective totals

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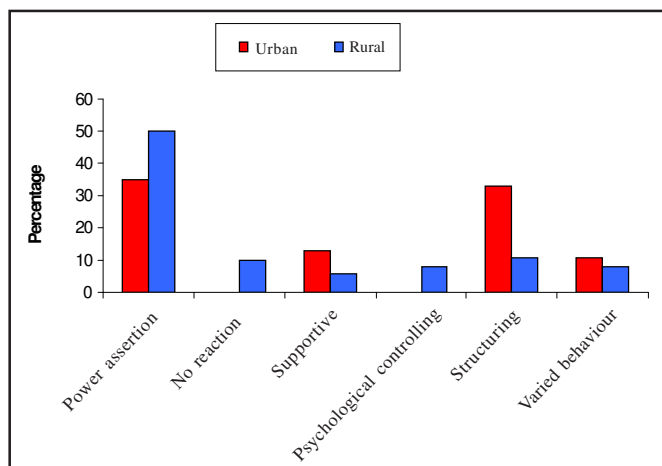
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Fig. 1 : Strategies used by mothers to cope with physical aggression in children

Only 11.67 per cent and 8.33 per cent mothers from urban and rural areas, respectively used 'supportive' strategy while 21.67 per cent and 26.67 per cent mothers used 'psychological controlling' strategy, respectively. Twenty five per cent and 16.67 per cent of mothers from urban and rural areas, respectively used 'structuring' strategy while 20 per cent and 11.67 per cent mothers used 'varied behaviour' strategy, respectively.

To investigate the strategies used by mothers, mothers' responses to different situations of their child displaying aggressive behaviour were taken. Mothers were verbally presented different situations where the child displayed aggressive behaviour and asked how they reacted in such a situation. The responses given were put in six categories namely structuring, power assertion, psychological controlling, supportive, no reaction, and varied behaviour. The mothers sometimes used one strategy, sometimes another. Example, sometimes explain to the child to behave or at times slap the child to make him properly behaving. Menna and Landy (2001) used a

structured interview to categorize the mother's perceptions and subjective experience of her child and their relationship. Associations between the mother's perception of the relationship with her child, her parenting behaviour, and the behaviour of the child were discussed. Burgess *et al.* (2006) examined the attributions, emotional reactional reactions and coping strategies of shy/ withdrawn and aggressive girls and boys and to examine whether such social cognitions differ within the relationship context of friendship. Results revealed group and gender differences and similarities, depending on the relationship context. They found that friends' involvement during interpersonal challenges or stressors mitigated children's attributions, emotions and coping responses.

Varied behaviour:

In a situation where the child refused to obey the mother, some urban mothers said they explained to their child why he/she should obey her. Some rural respondents said they would also sometimes suggest alternative, say or do something to distract the child's mind from issue, so that the child forgets the main issue, later would tell him/ her to do what she wanted. This was usually done when the child refused to comply even after explaining and reasoning. Other mothers reported to use varied behaviour when their child refused to obey them. Some mothers reported that they would explain to their child if he refused to obey her, but at times would hit him/her. Hitting means slapping and/or scolding the child.

In urban areas, most of the mothers of boys used 'power assertion' and 'structuring' strategies to cope with physical aggression of the children whereas most of the mothers of girls used 'Varied Behaviour' strategy to cope with physical aggression of their children. Mothers find girls aggression to be more aversive than that of boys (Mills and Rubin, 1990). In rural areas, maximum of mothers of boys and girls used 'power assertion' strategy

Table 2: Strategies used by mothers to cope with verbal aggression (n=120)							
Variables	Power assertion	No reaction	Supportive	Psychological controlling	Structuring	Varied behaviour	Total n=60
Urban							
Boys	9 (25.00)	2 (5.56)	7 (19.44)	7 (19.44)	3 (8.33)	8 (22.22)	36 (60.00)
Girls	2 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	6 (25.00)	12 (50.00)	4 (16.67)	24 (40.00)
Total	11 (18.33)	2(3.33)	7 (11.67)	13 (21.67)	15 (25.00)	12 (20.00)	60 (100.00)
Rural							
Boys	14 (31.11)	3 (6.67)	5 (11.11)	10 (22.22)	6 (13.33)	7 (15.56)	45 (75.00)
Girls	4 (26.67)	1 (6.67)	0 (0.00)	6 (40.00)	4 (26.67)	0 (0.00)	15 (25.00)
Total	18 (30.00)	4 (6.67)	5 (8.33)	16 (26.67)	10 (16.67)	7 (11.67)	60 100.00)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage to the respective totals
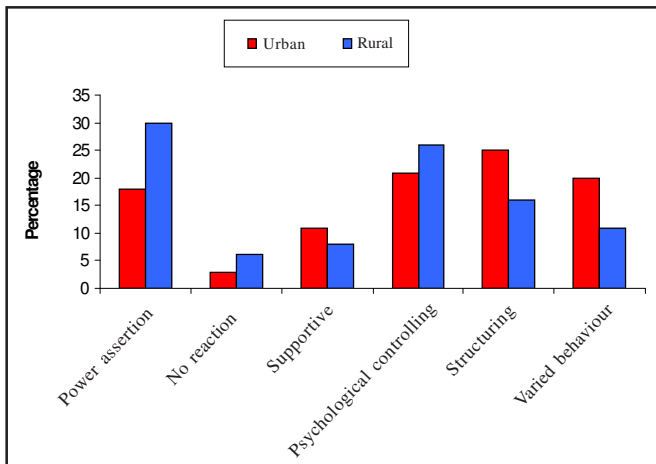
Fig. 2 :   Strategies used by mothers to cope with verbal aggression in children

to cope with physical aggression of their children. Boys were targets of punishment more often than girls (Hastings and Rubin, 1999). In urban areas, for mothers of boys, almost uniform distribution of responses were recorded whereas half of the mothers of girls used 'structuring' strategy to cope with verbal aggression of their children. In rural areas, maximum of mothers of boys used 'power assertion' strategy while maximum of mothers of girls used 'psychological controlling' strategy to cope with verbal aggression of their children. In urban areas, most of the mothers of children used 'power assertion' and 'structuring' strategies while in rural areas, exactly half of the mothers of children used 'power assertion' strategy to cope with physical aggression of their children. In urban areas, most of the mothers of children used 'structuring', 'psychological controlling' and 'varied behaviour' strategies while in rural areas, maximum of mothers used 'power assertion' and 'psychological controlling' strategies to cope with verbal aggression of their children.

Conclusion:

In urban areas, most of the mothers of boys used 'power assertion' and 'structuring' strategies to cope with physical aggression of the children whereas most of the mothers of girls used 'varied behaviour' strategy to cope with physical aggression of their children. In rural areas, maximum of mothers of boys and girls used 'power assertion' strategy to cope with physical aggression of their children. In urban areas, for mothers of boys, almost uniform distributions of responses were recorded whereas half of the mothers of girls used 'structuring' strategy to cope with verbal aggression of their children. In rural areas, maximum of mothers of boys used 'power assertion'

strategy while maximum of mothers of girls used 'psychological controlling' strategy to cope with verbal aggression of their children. In urban areas, most of the mothers of children used 'power assertion' and 'structuring' strategies while in rural areas, half of the mothers of children used 'power assertion' strategy to cope with physical aggression of their children. In urban areas, most of the mothers of children used 'structuring', 'psychological controlling' and 'varied behaviour' strategies while in rural areas, maximum of mothers used 'Power assertion and 'psychological controlling' strategies to cope with verbal aggression of their children.

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