

## Socialization within the Family

**Sowmya B.M.**

---

---

### Introduction

Socialization (or socialisation) is a term used by sociologists, social psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists and educationalists to refer to the lifelong process of inheriting and disseminating norms, customs and ideologies, providing an individual with the skills and habits necessary for participating within his or her own society. Socialization is thus 'the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained'. There are several contexts in which socialisation occur, including that of schools, peers and the media. This article is concentrated only on that which occurs within the FAMILY.

For most children, families are responsible for the initial socialization process. Families have a major and long lasting effect on children's lives. The home and the family is the first environment of learning for the child where the acquisition of knowledge, competencies, attitudes and values first begins.[1] The child learns many skills including language skills, social skills and emotional skills. Families are expected to care for and nurture children, financially provide for them and transmit cultural and moral values to them.[2] The child is actively involved in the socialisation process. Socialization is a two-way interaction with each person

influencing the other. Parents and children engage in reciprocal interaction, with children both responding to and eliciting behaviours.[3] The family is not a closed system. Family practices reflect the values of the culture as a whole. Parents are likely to follow the role requirements for parents in their culture and also listen to advice from their own parents and friends.[4] Families influence children's development in direct and indirect ways. Parents, siblings and extended family members can have an individual influence on children, but that influence is more than an individual one because it occurs in the context of the family.[2]

### *Family types*

Children's growing competence and development is largely influenced by family life and family relationships. Children's well-being continues to depend on the quality of family interactions. Children of today are growing up in a variety of households and different family systems. Family type plays an integral role in children's development.

Only child families: Many couples are now choosing to have children who will never have any siblings. Literature suggests that these children are often viewed as being spoiled, selfish, lonely and maladjusted, however, research does not agree with this negative view. Only children appear to be bright and successful, self-confident, self-reliant, resourceful and popular with other children. "A major reason for this may be that only children have somewhat closer relationships with parents, who exert more pressure for mastery and accomplishment".[5] Only children often have more pressure placed upon them by parents to excel in tasks and have often high expectations for school and sporting

---

---

**Author's Affiliation:** \*Lecturer, Dept. Of Nutrition, Shri Siddaganga Institute of Nursing Sciences and Research Center, Tumkur, Karnataka.

**Reprint's request:** Smt. Sowmya B.M., M.Sc (Home Science), Lecturer, Dept. Of Nutrition, Shri Siddaganga Institute of Nursing Sciences, and Research Center, Tumkur, Karnataka.

E-mail: soumya\_tumkur2007@yahoo.co.in

(Received on 24.04.2013, accepted on 22.05.2013)

results placed upon them. Only children miss out on the growing and learning and forms of socialisation which comes with having siblings. Only children have the advantage of not having to fight for their parents' attention and may have the opportunity of more one-on-one interactions. The one-child family has both pros and cons, as does every family lifestyle.[6]

#### *Large families*

Children of large families obviously experience different conditions from those in smaller or one child families. Children in larger families have the advantage of having relationships with siblings. These relationships and interactions give them the opportunity to have companionship, emotional support and assistance while they are growing up. Children in larger families often experience degrees of rivalry and may need to fight for parents' attention. The positive interactions that occur between siblings contribute to perspective taking, moral maturity, and competence in relating to other children.[1]

#### *Single parent families*

The numbers of one-parent families have become more common in recent years. There are a number of varieties of one-parent families; those resulting from divorce, parents who never-married, as well as a widowed parent. In single parent families the other parent not living with the family may have little or no involvement in the child's life or may be highly involved. This article looks more closely at single divorced parents and never-married single parents.

#### *Single divorced parent families*

The largest percentage of single-parent families are headed by divorced female parents. "The assumption has been made that the trauma from divorce is likely to result in poorly socialized, cognitively deficient children who experience poor parent-child relationships".[7] In many situations this may

be the case but no relationship can be generalized. "Research has also been undertaken on healthy single-parent families where it was found, in general, that the physical and mental health of the children appeared to be good". It has been suggested that children living with their mothers are healthier than those living with fathers. The majority of children show improved adjustments by 2 years after divorce. Yet for a few, persisting emotional distress and declines in school achievement still exist.

#### *Never-married single parent families*

It is believed that a cultural shift towards later marriage has contributed to a rise in never-married motherhood. "It has been thought that children in these kinds of families are shielded from marital strife, children of never-married mothers show slightly better academic performance and emotional adjustments than do children of divorced or remarried mothers. But they do not do as well as children in first marriage families compared with children of two parent reared families".[1] Although compared with children of two parent families, these children may experience less attention, difficulties in interactions with other children, a lack in school performance and behaviours associated with the lack of a male parental influence.

#### *Blended families*

The blended family is one in which either parent brings with them children from a previous marriage. "For some children, this expanded family network is a positive turn of events that brings with it greater adult attention. But for most, it presents difficult adjustments".[1] It is clear that there are many difficulties in accepting a step-parent into the family, especially one who may have different child rearing practices, from which the child is used to. Research has found that children of remarriage are likely to experience difficulty in accepting the marriage. This extends from some children having to - deal with the loss of

a primary parent to acceptance of a new one. Other feelings experienced may include divided loyalties, confusion in terms of belonging, and confusion due to membership in two households and unreasonable expectations due to the whole adjustment process. But how well children adapt is related to the overall quality of family functioning.[1,2,4,6-9]

#### *Gay and lesbian parent families*

A larger percentage of the homosexual populations are rearing children. Families headed by a homosexual parent or gay or lesbian couple are very similar to those of heterosexuals. "Gay and lesbian parents are committed to and effective at the parental role. Some research indicates that gay fathers are more consistent in setting limits and more responsive to their children's needs than are heterosexual fathers".[1] In lesbian families quality of mother-child interaction is as positive as in heterosexual families. It has been found that children of lesbian mothers regard their mothers' partner as very much a parent. "Overall, children of homosexuals can be distinguished from other children only by issues related to living in a non-supportive society. The great concern of gay and lesbian parents is that their children will be stigmatized by their parents' sexual orientation".

#### *Adoptive parent families*

There are a number of different reasons for the emergence of adoptive parent families. Other than partners being infertile, there are situations where parents don't want to risk passing on a genetic disorder, or who are older and single but want a family. Adoptive families cannot be categorized as they are all very highly diverse, and each family can face a multitude of common challenges. "Different heredity means that adoptive parents and children are less alike in intelligence and personality than are biological relatives - resemblances that can contribute to family harmony".[1] All adopted children and adolescents - whether born in a foreign

country or the country of their adoptive parents experience some degree of emotional stress. Feelings include those of abandonment and not knowing exactly where their origins are. "Adoption is a satisfying family alternative for most parents and children who experience it. The outcomes are usually good because of careful pairing of children with parents and guidance provided to adoptive families".

#### *Grandparent reared families*

The number of grandparents rearing grandchildren has increased over the past decade. "Usually, grandparents step in because of substance abuse, emotional problems, or physical illness prevents the child's parents, most often the mother, from engaging in competent child rearing".[1] This situation can cause a lot of emotional distress for both the child, adjusting to a new situation and for the grandparents who have been suddenly placed into a child-rearing situation. "Previous family experiences have left their mark, in the form of high rates of learning difficulties, depression, and anti-social behaviour".[1] Children in this environment usually receive a lot of love and also experience the required parental guidance.

#### *Parenting styles*

Parents play a large role in fostering their child's growth and development. Many writers have noted that the broad pattern of parenting is important in predicting child well-being. Parents may differ in how they try to control or socialise their children and the extent to which they do so. It's the overall pattern of interactions rather than one single act that shapes a child's behaviour. Parents develop various styles of interacting with their children. The four parenting styles; authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and uninvolved influence how the child develops.[1] These varying parenting styles greatly influence not only how a child develops and socialises but also how they learn. The different styles dictate how children

adapt to teaching approaches and methods in schools and how they interact in the classroom.

#### *Authoritarian*

This approach is highly controlling in its use of authority and places a high value on conformity. "These parents provide well-ordered and structured environments with clearly stated rules". The parent pours the 'right' information into the child who is considered an 'empty vessel'. As a result, they engage in very little give-and-take with children, who are unquestioning in manner. "Researchers have found that children of authoritarian parents tend to lack social competence, have lower self-esteem, are anxious and rarely take initiative in activities".[10] Boys showed high rates of anger and defiance while girls were dependent and lacking exploration. This style is inconsistent in a rapidly changing society which values choice and innovation. Most children of authoritarian parents do not feel as if they have a close relationship with their parents.[11]

#### *Authoritative*

This style is both demanding and responsive. "Parents retain their authority, stay in control and expect mature behaviour from their children".[10] They are assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive. Authoritative parents permit the child enough freedom of expression so that he or she can develop a sense of independence. Researchers have found that the best adjusted children, particularly in terms of social competence, had parents with an authoritative parenting style. "Children were seen to have higher self-esteem, social and moral maturity, involvement in school learning, self control and be less gender typed".[1-4,6-12]

#### *Permissive*

Children involved in this style are encouraged to think for themselves, avoid

inhibitions, and not value conformity. These parents are warm and accepting, but mainly concerned about not stifling their child's creativity. The parents are highly attuned to their child's developmental and emotional needs but have difficulty setting firm limits. "Permissive parents allow children to make many of their own decisions at an age when they are not yet capable of doing so".[1] Different literature has found that children of permissive parents are very immature, have difficulty controlling their impulses, and are reluctant to accept responsibility. They are found to be disobedient, rebellious and show less persistence at tasks in preschool than children of parents who exert more control."The link between permissive parenting and dependent, non-achieving behaviour was especially strong for boys".[1]

#### *Uninvolved*

Uninvolved parents are low in both responsiveness and demandingness. They show little commitment to providing care for their child. They provide only the bare essentials. "In extreme cases, this parenting style might entail neglect and rejection".[10] Often these parents are emotionally detached and depressed having little time and energy to spare for children. They may respond to the child's demands for easily accessible objects, but any efforts that involve long term goals, such as establishing and enforcing rules about homework and acceptable social behaviour, are weak and fleeting. Different literatures suggest the following as signs of uninvolved parenting: deficits in attachment, cognition, play, emotional and social skills and may display aggressive and acting-out behaviour. In response to these different parenting styles, one should be aware that parenting is not a one-sided activity. It's a dynamic, interactive situation, and children have their own styles or temperaments that in turn affect their parents' styles and elicit different responses. "Obviously, parents don't fit neatly into the parent style categories. Most parents use a combination of styles; however, one style

usually predominates”.

#### *Application in the classroom*

The way a child has been raised and reared has a big consequence on their behaviour in later years and particularly in their behaviour and interactions at school. Parenting style has been found to predict child well-being in the domains of social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behaviour. Consequences for the classroom inflicted by the variety of parenting styles will be in the form of interactions between children, responses to authority (the teacher), behaviour and learning [1]. Classrooms are a dynamic environment made up of children from a variety of backgrounds. All of the above factors need to be taken into consideration when dealing with different children. Teaching styles often have to be varied to accommodate different children. One method of behaviour management may be suitable to discipline a number of children but may be inappropriate when dealing with other children. Behaviour that their parents have instilled in them as being appropriate may not be accepted as appropriate in the classroom environment. Children's behaviour towards adults varies according to the different parenting styles and this behaviour is continued in the classroom in interactions with the teacher. The behaviours displayed will not always be acceptable. Teachers need to develop ways of dealing with children by setting guidelines, indicating that behaviour in the home environment is different from the way they behave at school.

#### *Sibling relationships*

Sibling relationships play an important role not only in the family life, but by influencing the way that the family functions within society. [9] Sibling relationships within the family cannot simply be put down to birth order, gender, and number of siblings and spacing of siblings. Children's personalities, the social circumstances and the relationships

between child and parent also need to be considered. However, “the sex and personality of the firstborn is more likely to influence the later born children in a direct way than vice versa”.

#### *Siblings*

Sibling relationships differ from culture to culture. In some societies siblings are identified by genealogical or biological criteria, where siblings have two biological parents and half siblings one. They may also be identified by legal criteria, such as step siblings or adoptive siblings. [9]

#### *Birth order*

It was once believed that the order in which children were born defined what sort of behaviour the child would develop and how successful they were likely to become.

First born children were likely to:

- Imitate sounds and actions of the mother
- Be influenced by parents
- Hold more responsibility and leadership type roles
- Use status and bribery tactics
- Be bossy and dominant
- Become powerful members of society
- Have increased behavioural or regressive problems

Whereas later born children were likely to:

- Sulk, pout, plead, cry and appeal to parents
- Imitate older sibling(s)
- Become weak members of society
- Be influenced by the sex and personality of the firstborn

While some of these observations do become apparent in some first and later born children, it isn't enough to generalize children's abilities based on their order of birth. There is no evidence to support such statements and they are far too simple. However, birth order does

provide “different opportunities such as availability of family resources, availability of parental time, energy, and attention, quality of the relationship with parents, and influence on younger siblings”. [9] Generally older siblings do have considerable influence on younger siblings’ cognitive, social and emotional development. They may take on the role as teacher, counselor, and confidante, without there being any obligation to do so. In other societies the older brother takes status in the family, followed by the oldest sister. Younger siblings are taught to respect and obey their older siblings as they would their parents. “In many cases the older sister has an important mediating role between the older brother and the younger siblings when inevitable conflicts develop”. [9]

#### *Gender*

It is often the relationship between sisters which appears to be the closest, with brother-sister pairs in between in closeness and brother-brother pairs least close. Sisters are more likely to take on care taking roles and maintain communication between the rest of the family and the brother(s). Sisters may also act as counselors for the brother(s) and motivators. Within other societies the brother-sister relationship is of “most importance in marital arrangements, and the brother-brother relationship in social and economical activities. Sisters and brothers are regarded as complementary, with brothers being the protectors of their sisters, and the sisters being the “spiritual mentors” of their brothers. [9]

#### *Number of siblings*

Most families have no more than three siblings. Factors such as the rising cost of rearing children, entry of women into the workforce and availability of effective birth control methods have caused this decline of births and increased the rate of single children. However, some families are now larger due to the addition of half and step siblings. It is thought that “disciplinary practices become more authoritarian and

punitive as family size increases and parents try to keep large numbers of youngsters in line”. [5] Within other societies, families are larger because more children are needed for work and “to help maintain daily family functioning and survival. The larger sibling group offers a greater support system for parents in old age as well as for the members of the sibling groups themselves”. [9]

#### *Age spacing*

An age gap of two-four years between siblings may be optimal for greater mental stimulation from one another while reducing conflict. And that the closer siblings are in age, the greater their chance is of sharing developmental events in similar ways. [8] Spacing siblings further apart may provide parents with greater opportunity for career development and improvement of the families’ economic status. However, “play, companionship and affection are shown whether the age gap is four years or only eleven months, so too are aggressions, hostility and teasing”.

#### *Gender role development*

In a society filled with gender stereotypes, children regularly learn to adopt gender roles. [1]

*Gender stereotypes:* widely held beliefs about characteristics thought appropriate for males and females.

*Gender roles:* the reflection of gender stereotypes in everyday behaviour

#### *Parents siblings*

Children are exposed to many factors which influence their attitudes and behaviours regarding gender roles. These attitudes and behaviours are generally learned in the home and are then reinforced by the child’s peers, school experience and the media. The strongest influence on gender role development seems to occur within the family, with parents passing on, both overtly and

### Personality Traits Regarded as Stereotypically Masculine and Feminine[1]

Masculine Traits	Feminine Traits
Active	Considerate
Aggressive	Devotes self to others
Ambitious	Emotional
Competitive	Gentle
Dominant	Home oriented
Feels superior	Kind
Independent	Likes children
Self confident	Passive

covertly, their own beliefs about gender. Although the past three decades have brought a new level of awareness about the wide range of roles possible for each gender, strong beliefs about differences still remain.

#### Parents

*Infancy and early childhood:* A child's earliest exposure to what it means to be male or female comes from parents. Children internalize their parent's messages regarding gender at an early age, with awareness of adult sex role differences being found in two year old children.[3] Parents treat sons and daughters differently. Before children can express their own preferences, parents begin to create different environments for boys and girls. Bedrooms are decorated with colours and themes and infants are dressed in gender-specific colours - pink for girls and blue for boys. Parents encourage their sons and daughters to participate in sex typed activities. Girls are encouraged to play with dolls and tea sets and boys are encouraged to play with cars and footballs. Early in development, parents provide experiences that encourage assertiveness, exploration and emotional control in boys. In contrast they promote

imitation, dependency and emotional sensitivity in girls.

*Middle childhood:* During middle childhood, issues of achievement become more important to parents as children's skills expand. Many research observations of mothers and fathers interacting with their school-age children reveal that they demand greater independence from boys and more often help their daughters than their sons. Parents also hold gender-differentiated expectations for children's competencies in school subjects. Parents rate daughters as more competent in English than sons but sons as more competent in maths and sports. These beliefs are stronger than the actual skill differences among children. Parents also allow greater freedom to boys than girls, allowing boys to roam further away from home than girls. Boys are more likely to have maintenance chores around the house such as painting and mowing the lawn, while girls are more likely to participate in domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning. This assignment of household tasks by gender leads children to define certain types of work as being male or female.[3]

*Mothers versus fathers:* In most aspects of differential treatment of boys and girls, fathers discriminate the most. Fathers engage in more physically stimulating play with their sons than with daughters, whereas mothers tend to play in a quieter way with both sexes. In childhood, fathers more than mothers encourage "gender-appropriate" behaviour and they place more pressure to achieve on sons. Parents seem committed to ensuring the gender typing of children of their own sex. Mothers are more likely to go on shopping trips and bake biscuits with their daughters and fathers are more likely to play cricket or go fishing with their sons.[1]

*Non-stereotypical parents:* There are costs involved in maintaining gender role stereotypes. These costs include limiting opportunities for both sexes, ignoring talent and perpetuating unfairness in society. When children are exposed to non-stereotyped models, for example, mothers who are employed or fathers who do the ironing and

cooking, they are less traditional in their beliefs and behaviours. These children have been found to have higher self-esteem, higher levels of identity achievement and more flexibility in dating and relationships. [1-4,6-9] Girls with career-oriented mothers more often engage in typically masculine activities have higher educational aspirations and hold nontraditional vocational goals.

*Siblings:* Growing up with siblings of the same or opposite sex also affects gender typing. Sibling effects are complex because their impact depends on birth order and family size. In an observation study of the play behaviours of 4 to 9 year olds, the activities of same sex siblings were highly "gender appropriate". However, among mixed-sex siblings, choices of play were determined by the sex of the older child. This effect was so strong that boys with older sisters played "house" and "dolls" as much as pairs of sisters did. In contrast, boys with older brothers never engaged in these "feminine" activities. [1] Other research contradicts these findings. For example, when 9-year-olds were videotaped playing with toys in a laboratory, preference for "other gender" toys was more common with children who had siblings of the same sex as themselves. And individuals with same-sex siblings seem to be less stereotyped in their interests and personality characteristics than those from mixed-sex families. In all-girl and all-boy families, children are more likely to be assigned "cross-gender" chores because no "gender-appropriate" child is available to do the job.

## References

1. Berk, L. (2000). *Child Development*. (5<sup>th</sup> Edition) Boston, Allyn & Bacon
2. Bowes, J.M. & Watson, J. (1999). Families as a context for children. Ch 5 in Bowes, J. & Hayes, A. (Eds) *Children, Families, and Communities*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
3. Witt, S.D. (1997). Parental influence on children's socialization to gender roles. *Adolescence*. Vol 32 (126) pp. 253-259.
4. Arnett, J.J. (1995). Broad and Narrow Socialization: The Family in the Context of a Cultural Theory. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Vol 57 (3), pp.617-631.
5. Berk, L. (1996). *Infants, Children & Adolescents*. Boston, Allyn & Bacon.
6. Papalia, D. & Olds, S. (1995). *Life Span Development*. Australia, McGraw - Hill Book Company Australia.
7. Hamer, T. & Turnover, P. (1990). *Parenting in Contemporary Society*. USA, Prentice-Hall Inc.
8. Bank, S.P. & Khan M.D. (1982). *The Sibling Bond*. New York, Basil Books Inc.
9. Cicirelli, V.G. (1994). *Sibling Relationships in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. Vol 56. Pp 7-22.
10. Goodman & Gurian, 1999, *Parenting Styles/ Children's Temperaments: The Match* URL:[http://www/aboutourkids.com/articles/parentingstyles.html](http://www.aboutourkids.com/articles/parentingstyles.html).
11. Huxley, R. 2001, *The Four Styles of Parenting*. URL:<http://myria.com/relationships/parenting/fourstyles.htm>.
12. Dinwiddie, S. 1995, *Effective Parenting Styles* URL:<http://www.kidsource.com/better.world.press/parenting.html>.