

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems confronting the student of child development in India today is the fact that almost all available sources of research findings on child rearing norms and the relation of child rearing practices to personality development are in non-Indian textbooks.

To meet with such lack of literature to some extent, the investigator has undertaken to study the intellectual and personality characteristics of the first-born, in relation to those of others, in the families of varied sizes in Gujarat. The sample of this study covers the adolescent group. Adolescence is widely accepted as a 'problem age'. While every age seems to have behaviour associated with it that proves to be troublesome to adults, the behaviour of the adolescent seems to be especially troublesome.

Do the first and subsequent children usually reveal sharp and typical differences in intellectual traits and personality

development ? If so, why ? These questions often fascinate parents, and are of perennial interest to the students of psychology. The present study purports to answer some of such questions.

Personality refers not necessarily to any particular sort of activity, such as talking, remembering, thinking or living; but an individual can reveal his personality in the way he does any of these things, meaning that personality is a style of his life. According to Woodworth and D.G. Marquis,¹ "Personality can be broadly defined as the total quality of an individual's behaviour, as it is revealed in his habits of thought and expression, his attitudes and interests, his manner of acting, and his personal philosophy of life".

It has been often said that child's rank among the siblings, i.e. whether he is the only child, the first child or the last child is a significant factor, just as the degree of a child, i.e. 'the most wanted' or 'unwanted' child is a factor on which the nature of the treatment and the relations highly depend. While each position provides certain emotional satisfactions and dissatisfactions for the child, the effect of the position the child has in the family constellation will be influenced by his age and sex. Thus, to a certain extent, the advantages and disadvantages of different positions depend upon the child himself as much as upon the position he holds within the family. As Baughman and Welsh² have summarised,

1. R.S. Woodworth and D.G. Marquis : Psychology, (London : Methuen, 1947), pp. 87-88.
2. Baughman Earl and George Schlager Welsh : Personality - A Behavioural Science, (New Jersey:Prentice Hall,1962),p.44.

it is said :

"Not only sex but also ordinal position in the family may affect a child's experience. A first-born baby, for example, is more likely to be breast-fed for a longer time than is a later-born child. Obviously, too, a first-born child has the experience of being an only child for a significant period, whereas later-born children usually do not. Furthermore, a first-born has an inexperienced mother whom he must teach. In this way ordinal position may influence a child's experience".

Studies on personality and social adjustment have revealed that the oldest child is in a position which makes successful adjustment very difficult, perhaps more difficult than for children in any other ordinal position. Social anthropologist Margaret Lantis is quoted by McArthur³ as summarising her impressions thus :

"The eldest child is adult-oriented. He is more likely to be serious (that is, his feelings are hurt easily and he does not need much punishment), conscientious, 'good', fond of books or fond of doing things with adults".

The most vital single fact about the first or the oldest child is that once he was the only child. In most families, that position means that he is the subject of constant fondling, praise and attention. Even if he is not 'spoiled' in his training, he is inevitably rewarded constantly with flattering

3. McArthur, C. : "Personalities of First and Second Children"; Psychiatry, 19,47-54, 1956.

attention from adults, because he has been the only child in the family. If he has been the only child for four or five years, he is very likely to be a self-indulgent as well as anxious child.

The age difference between children is an important factor in determining how the mother treats them. When they are closely spaced, it is better for both mother and children, since she treats them more rationally, more democratically and with more understanding. Parents tend to handle second children more permissively and in a more relaxed way. McArthur⁴ quotes Gesell saying that, "The first baby makes the greatest demands upon the mother, both physically and psychologically. The second benefits thereby". The first child discovers suddenly that his mother has taken a strange child, who gets most of her fondling and time. If the first-born discovers gradually that he is still the better loved, he may be somewhat reassured. But each new skill, each new privilege gained by the second-born probably will frighten the older child and stir up his jealousy again. The blunt truth is that the first child is often an irreconcilable. He once had all, he now has only a part. No matter how much attention and love he wins from his parents, he can never have their undivided love again. The second child is in a quite different position. From the time he is born, he shares attention with another child, and is therefore a little nearer to cooperation than the oldest child.

4. McArthur, C. : Ibid., 19,47-54,1956.

Sears points out that "By the time the second child arrives, parents are less anxious and more experienced in their roles. As a result, the relationship with the second child is different, and this child is less dependent than the first-born was". The second child is spared much of the anxiety and emotional tension his parents experienced when the first baby was born. If the oldest is not fighting against him and pushing him back, he is very well situated. The mother's attitude towards the second child is likely to be more stable than towards the first, even when the third child arrives.

Do the middle children really occupy the most difficult position? Bakwin and Bakwin⁵ summarized their impressions as follows :

"The family situation confronting the in-between child is more complex than in the case of his predecessor, for he must deal not only with his parents, but also with the personality of the first-born. The first-born is bigger and stronger, has greater liberty of action and constant priority in life's experiences. It is of considerable moment that many of the in-between's prize possessions - toys, clothes, etc. - come to him second hand- Then, too, the first-born sets the pace for the other children in educational matters". In this way, the middle children may, by virtue of receiving neither the attention accorded to the oldest nor the recognition given to the youngest,

5. Bakwin and Bakwin : Clinical Management of Behaviour Disorders in Children, pp. 104-105.

be permitted to fall into the background of parental notice and affection. Such a situation may readily lead to a sense of insecurity. Again, it is the treatment a child receives and his ordinal position in the family that determine the direction of his personality development.

Only children and youngest children are sometimes said to be much alike in behaviour. The youngest child in the family frequently remains a baby, too long. He is likely to be pampered and spoiled by the other members of the family, who continue to do things for him long after he is capable of doing them for himself. According to Adler,⁶ "All other children can be dethroned, but never the youngest. He has no followers but many pacematers. He is always the baby of the family, probably the most pampered and faces the difficulties of a pampered child. But, because he is so much stimulated and has many chances for competition, he often develops in an extraordinary way, runs faster than the other children, and overcomes them all".

G. Stanley Hall claims that "Being an only child is a disease in itself".⁷ The only child develops a personality pattern distinctly different from that of children with siblings. According to Blanton and Blanton, "The only child is greatly

6. Adler, Alfred : The Individual Psychology, New York : Basic Books Inc.

7. Elizabeth, Hurlock : Child Development, New York : McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc.

handicapped. He cannot be expected to go through life with the same capacity for adjustment that the child reared in the family with other children has".⁸

Several studies have been made on birth order, sibling rivalry and specially first-born child. The parent is cognizant of the fact that his own actions, anxieties, abilities and perhaps aspirations change as a function of the sex of his child and the order of its birth. Students of child development have long been interested in the implications which a child's position among his siblings has for his subsequent intellectual and personality development. Indirectly, it is the size of the family that has been found to play an important role in the child's personality development, since size of the family affects the different ordinal position.

THE PROBLEM

The above introduction points out the importance of the ordinal position of a child in his developmental process. Like all types of psychological studies the field of developmental psychology is also concerned with the accurate description, explanation and prediction of behaviour. Several workers⁹ in the field of developmental psychology (Adler, 1925; Becker and Carroll, 1962; Bossard and Boll, 1960) point out that the order of birth of a child in the family has an important

8. Elizabeth B. Hurlock : Ibid.

9. Reddy, N.Y. : "A Study of the Relationship Between Ordinal Position of Adolescents and Their Adjustment", Indian Psychological Review, Vol. 4, 1967.

influence on the child's behavioural problems. Ultimately such study provides us with a useful background for a more thorough understanding of adult behaviour. It is well said that "the child is father of the man".

Much has been written about the influence on a child of his birth order in the family. To be an 'only' child, the oldest or the youngest, for example, is supposed to carry with it certain particular labels in personality development. It is a common fallacy to imagine that children of the same family exhibit similar personality development under the same environment. Of course, there is much which is the same for all children in the same home, but the psychological situation of each child is individual and differs from that of others, because of the order of their succession.

Even where a general cultural attitude towards children exists, the attitude of parents towards their children is markedly influenced by their own intelligence and personality patterns and their attitudes towards children as individuals. Attitudes vary from adult to adult and from time to time in the same adult. The parent may be over-indulgent at certain times and over-strict at others. It is said that strong-willed parents have weak-willed children. The parent's attitudes towards the intellectual and personality characteristics of the first-born and others may be a reflection of their own adjustment or maladjustment to life and to marriage. Family happiness and unity are markedly affected by such factors as

husband-wife relationships, in-law interference, sibling relationships, money problems or the physical or mental health and personality characteristics of the parents.

Among most of the families the attitude of the parent towards the sex of the child also influences the pattern of parental behaviour from the moment of the child's birth. There is a tendency for parents to prefer the first child to be a boy. For many of us, still a boy is a blessing and a girl the lost bet of married life. She normally gets a second-rate treatment. Two distinct classes are thus being created in each generation by man-oriented civilization. Boys grow up to be aggressive and tyrannical, and girls become prudish, morbid or hysterical. All such differences are observed in development because the girl child has not been given a fair deal.

The age of the parents also affects the intellectual and personality development of children. Young parents are likely to take their parental responsibilities lightly, while average parents are apt to be more nervous and less energetic than are younger parents. This causes them to be over-protective, exacting and demanding.

The educational level of the parent is another important factor like the age. Parents of higher educational level favour more freedom for their children, while those of lower educational level favour more restraint.

Sometimes, without taking into consideration the child's abilities or disabilities, his interest or ambitions, over-ambitious parents plan for his future so as to fulfill their own ambitions or to satisfy some thwarted wishes in their own lives. It has been said facetiously that there are no problem children, but only problem parents. Mostly problem parents have problem children and parents with healthy personality have normal children.

In short, besides birth order, the sex of the child, parents' intelligence, education, age, ambitions, interests, attitudes or parents' own problems and personality also affect their own children's life. The main purpose of the present investigation is to study only the birth order as related to the intellectual and personality characteristics of the children in families of varied sizes.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

It is worthwhile going into the early life years of children in families of various sizes to find out why certain children develop into more intellectual and others of average or below-average intelligence; similarly why certain children turn out to be social and fun-loving, whereas others withdraw into their own shell and daydreams. Many developmental psychologists agree that the upbringing of children differs with different ordinal positions and with the size of the family into which they are brought up. Parental surprise

about these differences stems from the half-grasped genetic assumption that the children who have the same biological parents and the same family environment should be similar. But do they ? In fact siblings conceived at different times do not receive the same genetic input from their parnents. There is some overlap, but it is far from complete. Neither is the family environment identical. Further, each position provides certain emotional satisfactions and dissatisfactions for the child; the effect of the position the child has in the family constellation will be again influenced by his age and sex. Professor Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck are of this opinion when they say : "Only children, first children and youngest are thought to be specially vuluerable to the development of behaviour difficulties because they receive preferential treatment"¹⁰. By virtue of being the only, the eldest or the youngest child, they have different experiences during growth and different relationships.

In a country like India, where over-population and comparatively lower income and living standard amongst world nations are major problems to be solved, one cannot ignore the need for planned parenthood and the best available child care. It is quite normal to come across families where the first addition to the family is usually welcome, but the subsequent additions are received as inevitable or unavoidable results of married life. Naturally, therefore, children

10. Sears, Maccoby and Levin : Patterns of Child Rearing.

receive different amount of parental care and treatment. This would have considerable effect on the intellectual and personality development of different children in the same family, and hence, it needs special attention for study in a country like ours.

It is a fact that the progress of a society or a nation depends upon the way their children are brought up. The behaviour of a person depends upon the way he is brought up, the way he is reared up and trained right from the very early childhood. The very fundamental experience which he gets in early childhood has certain imprint on his personality development. It has been pointed out that the child's personality is the result of the impact on him of all the conscious and unconscious expressions of parents' personalities as well as their conscious attitude towards children and their bringing up. The type of relationship that exists among siblings has also much the same influence on the child's personality development as does his relationship with his parents.

Ordinal position or size of the family has been always found to have some influence on the personality development of each child. Size of the family is a significant factor in the development of personality. Children from small families not only develop personality pattern different from those coming from large families, but on the whole, the personality pattern is said to be better. In larger families adequate care and supervision, and the parents love and affection to

meet the needs of each child become rare and more difficult with mounting household chores, financial worries and other problems of day-to-day living; there is a corresponding increase with the proportion of children in anxiety and neurotic symptoms or in problems of specific habit formation. The differential contribution of family size to behavioural problems suggests that conditions for personality growth and development may be more favourable for some aspects in smaller families and for others in larger families.

Bossard and Boll¹¹ identified in large families eight general personality roles - responsible, sociable, socially ambitious, studious, isolate, irresponsible, ill and spoiled. In their opinion, these roles seemed to be related to the position in the family.

All this exposition points to the importance and urgency for the study of the problem. It helps a great deal to understand the child's growth and behaviour. In a growing nation like India, this type of research helps to build up and understand the growth of healthy personalities, healthy societies and ultimately the healthy nation. Now-a-days, among many problems faced, by our country, those that need urgent attention are the population problems; related to these are problems resulting from lack of child-care, lack of family planning, poverty, illiteracy and so on. The psychological

11. Bossard and Boll : The Sociology of Child Development, New York : A Harper International Edition, pp. 37-42.

consequences of lack of understanding of these problems are far serious. Especially it is now high time that one should undertake such research in area of child development.

PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

In view of the importance of the problem, the present investigation has been undertaken with a view to studying the intellectual and personality characteristics of the first-born in relation to those of other siblings in the families of varied sizes.

There is a growing awareness and increasing concern in the country about the general care and well-being of the child. The children of today are the citizens of to-morrow. The very existence and future of every society depends upon the manner in which the children are brought up. They are like flowers opening to the sunshine. Parents should water them with love, affection and support and protect these flowering gems from damaging experiences. Whatever impressions they form in their early years will permanently affect their personality and growth as social beings.

Family is the most vital institution in which the child gets satisfaction of his physical, emotional and social needs. A person builds up his mental health when he is emotionally secure during his childhood. When a child is deprived of his own home because of death of either one or both of his parents

or when a child is without normal guardianship of parents or when he receives differential treatment in the family due to some reason or the other, it has detrimental effects on his development in one way or the other. Such instances leave lasting scars on his later life. The very fundamental experience which he gets in early childhood has certain imprint on his personality development.

The main purpose of the present study is to investigate in detail the first-born children in as many aspects as possible. In every family the chain of children starts with first-born child; subsequent children learn so many good/bad things from first-born child. Thus, the main purpose is to study the intellectual and personality characteristics of the first-born children in relation to those of the second-born, the middle-born and the last-born children.

An attempt is also made to study a few other variables such as size of the family, the sex differences in characteristics in children of same order etc. The investigation aims mainly to study differences in some intellectual and personality characteristics of children of different birth order positions.

This study indirectly touches the main burning problem of our nation, viz. the population problem. The size of the family affects the total development of personality. Thus, this investigation will indirectly enlighten the parents on the relation of the family size to the development of the

child, and this will indirectly serve the same purpose as do the studies on need of family planning. The findings of this investigation, it is hoped, will be useful to parents, educationists, reformers and all those who are associated with the welfare of the youth.

The author holds with confidence that whatever difficulties, limitations and weaknesses are involved in the attempt, it is an accurate exposition of facts observed and purports to be of definite use to those interested.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To be more specific, the objectives of the study are summarized below :

1. To study the intellectual and personality characteristics of the first-born children in relation to those of the only child, the second-born, the middle-born and the last-born children; the personality characteristics specially studied are personality traits such as introversion-extroversion, reformist-conservative scale, anxiety level and other adjustments; intellectual characteristics studied are academic achievement, study habits, reading interests, etc.
2. To find out whether there is any significant relation of birth order to intellectual and personality characteristics of the sample.

3. To study the sex differences in these characteristics.
4. To study whether existing family size is related to personality development of children.
5. To study the personal, social and family adjustment of subjects in relation to their birth order and sex.
6. To suggest some measures with respect to welfare, progress and desirable growth of children, with special emphasis on child care.