

RESEARCH SUMMARY

"Intergenerational conflicts regarding child rearing practices
and its effect on certain behavior of children"

by

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Introduction and background

A family everywhere is composed of interacting personalities. The number of persons and closeness of involvement varies with definitions of family. Almost all adults take part in some family involvement. It may be as parents or grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, or as sons and daughters.

In 1976, it was found that an average of roughly one-third of the households in Thai villages were extended stem family households (Potter, 1976). The data obtained in Potter's study raised serious doubts about the loose-structure theorists' contention that the nuclear family was the basic and preferred form in rural Thailand. According to Potter, census figures on household composition alone did not give an understanding of the family life of a people unless combined with an understanding of the ideal norms governing residence and family life. The contention that the nuclear family and neo-local residence was the ideal in Thailand might not be correct. Probably, the extended family, based upon a preferential rule of matrilocality

residence, was still the basic family form of the rural Thai. Also the bilateral kindred appeared to be a universal feature of Thai village and of great importance in villagers' lives. However, a Thai sociologist reported in his study that he did not agree with the Western sociologists' and anthropologists' finding indicating that the extended family was the basic family form in Thai rural areas (Samagkarn, 1985). Based on his in-depth study and its analysis, he insisted that the ideal type model of Thai family is still nuclear family. In case the extended family exists, it exists only temporarily and this should be called as limited extended family.

While some theorists in sociology had suggested that extended kinships would become less important, more recent studies have suggested that a modified extended family system is emerging, based on mutual affection and reciprocal aid assistance, which may be even more appropriate than the isolated nuclear family due to the occupational and geographical mobility of present day urban society.

Based on research studies of social influences on child development undertaken in 3 main geographical regions of Thailand, a wide permissible pattern of child rearing was revealed. With respect to socializing agents, grandmother was found to play a more important role than grandfather in not only looking after young grandchildren but also conserving and transmitting all kinds of traditional cultural values to young children (Bangkok Institute for Child Study, 1966, 1967, 1969 and 1971). When viewing the anticipated changing trend in more recent studies especially the one undertaken 20 years apart by the same Institute (BSRI, 1981), the permissive pattern of child rearing was still in general found to be unchanged. However, there were some points of changing emphasis in the role of child care that indicated more

need to have father more actively shared and involved in it, and also shifting emphasis on sex role socialization. Control of appropriate sex role behavior has lessened in such a way that boys and girls were treated more similarly.

Besides the fact that the limited extended type of family is still characteristic of Thai families, and the role of grandparents especially grandmother in child care and rearing is long well accepted, another important cultural value is placed on respect for seniority and authority. In general, young couple who are parents will respect their parents' voice for deciding on child care and rearing matters and usually tend to follow their advices. However, due to rapid socio-cultural changes, some traditional values are affected. Young parents once used to be passive recipient from their own parents, become now more independent. Besides, various other sources of information concerning child care and rearing can be more readily accessible to them. Due to the changes, grandparents may play their role in this respect to a lesser extent, and even so some possible conflict between young parents and their own parents regarding child care and socialization can be anticipated. The intergenerational disagreement or conflict may furthermore bring certain effects on children's attitude and behavior which certainly develop their personality growth and development.

Empirical research data on intergenerational conflict should help us to understand young parents' relationship with their own parents or old parents' relationship with their children. It is expected that findings from the study will add to more scientific information and understanding in child care roles performed and expected by parents of two generations, and also suggest some ways and means of coping the problem of intergenerational conflict if it exists to achieve more role congruence in socializing the child to his or her best potentialities.

Objectives

The study has the following objectives :

(1) to investigate the congruity or agreement between parents' and grandparents' attitudes in 4 different aspects of child rearings (beliefs and philosophy ; satisfying children's basic needs ; socialization practices ; and promotion for children's development).

(2) to compare learning readiness and prosocial behavior of children in the families where different amount of intergenerational conflict in child rearings exists.

(3) to compare grandparents' attitudes toward child rearings according to location, age, education, income, and child care experiences.

(4) to compare parents' attitude toward child rearing according to location, age, education, income and child care experiences.

(5) to compare children's learning readiness and prosocial behavior in families where educational levels of parents and those of grandparents differ.

(6) to compare children's learning readiness and prosocial behavior in families where grandparents' attitude toward child rearings differ.

(7) to compare children's learning readiness and prosocial behavior in families where parents' attitude toward child rearings differ.

Research methodology

First, preschool centers in Bangkok and in a neighboring province were randomly selected. By means of simple random sampling, five preschool centers in Bangkok and four preschool centers outside Bangkok were obtained. After that the researchers set criteria for the selection of preschool centers in order that these centers would assist in selecting children in the first year of preschool class. Finally a 100 pairs of parent-grandparent (mostly mothers

and grandmothers) of the children living in extended families were selected. The families of the sampled pair of parent-grandparent varied in their socio-economic status and were located in both urban area and rural area. Also twenty teachers of preschool centers where the sampled children attended were used to assess behavior characteristics of children.

Research instruments

Three kinds of research instruments were developed for use in the study. The first instrument was a four point scale attitude questionnaire on child rearings which consisted of 50 items categorized into 4 different aspects : (a) philosophy; belief and certain principles in child care and rearings, (b) children's basic need satisfaction, (c) child socialization, discipline and morality, and (d) promotion of child's growth and development. The second instrument was a five point scale measuring device on certain pro-social behavior characteristics of children in classroom situation and out of classroom situation, which consist of 20 items. The third instrument was an inventory to measure children's learning readiness, consisting of 64 items categorized into 4 different aspects namely (a) personal-social responsiveness, (b) associative vocabulary, (c) concept activation-numerical and (d) concept activation-sensory.

Collection of data

A group of interviewers and test administrators were trained for the purpose of having them understand the nature of each research instrument, and administrator the instruments in a uniform and unbiased maner.

Interviewing and administrating the research instrument with parents and grandparents were done individually. Also administration of children's

learning readiness inventory was done individually. As for the instrument to measure children's prosocial behavior characteristics, clear explanation for such assessment was given to preschool class teachers who cooperated in the study. These teachers would do the assessment on each child separately by using the observation form (5 points rating scale) supplied to them by the researchers.

Data treatment

Correlation technique, χ^2 test, t-test, and one way analysis of variance were employed in data analyses.

Main findings and discussions

(1) It was found that sampled parents were the ones who mainly decide on child care and rearing matters while grandparents would be ready to assist and give advice when requested. With respect to source of information and knowledge in child care, and practices in accordance with the source of knowledge, no relationship was found between these two variables and age, educational level, occupation and income of both grandparents and parents. However, it revealed that main sources of information and knowledge of child care and rearings were one own's parents and old relatives, medical doctors, and direct personal experience.

(2) As a whole the child care attitudes of parents and grandparents were found to be significantly positively correlated. The relationships between the child care attitudes of the two generations were found to be significantly correlated with regards to the aspect of philosophy and belief and the aspect of promotion of child's growth and development. However, the relationships between the child care attitudes of the two generations were correlated to a lesser extent with regards to the aspect of child basic need

satisfaction, and the aspect of child socialization. It can be interpreted that mothers and grandmothers tended to agree on the principle or theoretical aspect rather than on the practical aspect of child care and development. Grandmothers tended to express more adaptive attitude than mothers regarding the last two aspects.

(3) There was no difference in children's learning readiness and prosocial behavior characteristics in the families where different amounts of international conflict on child rearing exist. This finding might be due to the fact that the intergenerational conflict regarding child care and rearing was not keen enough or even might not actually exist in the families under this investigation. This was supported by the earlier evidence that the pairs of parents and grandparents expressed more congruity than incongruity in their child rearing attitude reflecting the adaptive attitudes of mothers of two generations toward one another in this regard. Another explanation might be that mother's child care and rearing attitude of the present generation could be explained by reference to their own mothers since the present generation mothers were more or less a product of their being socialized by their own mothers or mothers of the older generation. This may yield insignificant changes in maternal attitudes from one generation to the next.

(4) For the old generation group, grandparents (grandmothers) who lived in Bangkok area, had average educational attainment (secondary education), and received high income, were found to have better child care attitude than those living in provincial area, attaining high and low education (college education and primary education) and receiving low income, whereas no difference in child care and rearing attitude was found between

grandparents who had older ages and more child care and rearing experiences and those who had younger ages and less experiences.

(5) For the young generation group, parents (mothers) living in Bangkok area, attaining high education level, receiving high income, being in older age groups (high and middle), and having less experience in child care and rearings, were found to reveal better child care attitude than those living in provincial area, attaining lower educational level, receiving low income, being in younger age group and having more experience in child rearings.

Finding from the old generation group and the younger generation group showed both similar and different patterns. First, living in urban area may be an important exposure factor which make both parents and grandparents more readily accessible to all kinds of media which help make their child care experience more meaningful and broadening. Education is considered to be a very important background factor as well as exposure factor which make mothers of both generations to develop more proper attitude toward child care and rearings. High income also is a very important factor which make parents or grandparents welcome the arrival of their baby or to consider the new member of the family as a joy rather than burden. However it is interesting to note the different results in two generation groups when comes to the variable on child care and rearing experiences. As for the old generation group, the extent of child care experiences (as measured by the number of children they have brought up) was not found to have any relation to their expressed attitude toward child rearing. As a group, the mothers of old generation revealed their adaptive and positive attitude toward this matter. But for the young generation group, the extent of child

care experiences was found to have some bearing on their expressed attitude. That was the more they had child care experiences the less positive attitude was expressed toward child care and rearings, reflecting the fact that these young mothers still were unable to develop as much adaptive child care attitude as their own mothers yet.

(6) Children in the families where educational attainments of the pair of parents and grandparents differed were found to be similar in their learning readiness but different in prosocial behavior characteristics. In families where educational attainments of parents and grandparents differed less, children were shown to have better prosocial behavior characteristics. It could be interpreted that educational gap of mothers in two generations seemed not to have any effect on children's learning readiness. This might be due to the fact that grandmothers in the study generally preferred to play their role in giving unobtrusive guidance to young parents rather than to play their decisive and authoritative role. Young mothers were then able to prepare their own children's learning readiness. Yet, smaller educational gap of mothers and grandmothers might help the family members to interact with one another more personally and socially yielding in children of such family to develop better prosocial behavior characteristics comparing to their counterparts in the families of wider educational gap.

(7) It was found that children in families where grandparents' child care attitudes were more positive, revealed more of their learning readiness and some prosocial behavior characteristics than those in the families where grandparents had shown less positive child care attitudes.

(8) It was also found that children in the families where parents' child care attitudes were more positive, revealed more of their learning readiness and some prosocial behavior characteristics than those in the families where parents revealed less positive child care attitudes.

These two confirming results stressed the importance of child care and rearing attitudes as a determining factor in eliciting parents' and grandparents' child care behavior which would certainly affect the children in the families.

Conclusion

In conclusion, small amount of intergenerational conflict regarding child care and rearing was obtained from the study probably due to the homogeneous character of two generation groups in ways of child care and socialization. Parents and grandparents were generally found to have similar positive attitude toward child rearings which served as a significant factor in developing certain desirable characteristics in their children. Eventhough education was considered to be a main variable responsible for developing one's attitude toward child care and rearings, educational gap between mothers of two generations in this study was not found to associate with children's differences in learning readiness but found to be related to prosocial behavior characteristics. Grandparents were found to regard young parents capable of caring and rearing their own children while they could serve more in the supporting role.

On account of rapid socio-economic and cultural changes, young parents generally might have higher educational levels, occupational statuses, earning capacity than their older parents. Nevertheless, no one can deny that young parents are the product of their being socialized by their older generation parents. Adjustive or adaptive child care attitude due to broader views and more experiences in child rearings on the part of grandparents together with their preferred supporting role all help bridge the gap of any existing intergenerational conflict. Besides, young parents perceived themselves

as being able and more secure to rear their own children with the advice and unobstrusive guidance of their experienced mothers. These factors seem to complement one another so well that in such kind of extended family, children may become more prepared for developing their potential abilities for learning and living effectively.