CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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5.1 SUMMARY

The present research is in the personality and social structure tradition and tries to establish the bearing of the social world on individual differences.

Social psychological theory has long recognized the importance of an individual's membership groups in the development of personality. Among these groups, the family assumes prime importance as the chief agency of socialization. This research work has, therefore, been undertaken from the theoretical perspective that, as the family system influences personality, the particular structure of the family should affect the personality characteristics of the members belonging to it. The emphasis in the present study is jointly on personality and social structure, and aims to determine the relationship between the individual's personality characteristics and family organization. Such a study assumes special importance in societies such as ours, where different forms of family structures exist.
Stress, today, has become an integral aspect of life and has been found to be associated with physical and mental illness, accidents, and other harmful consequences. At the same time, however, certain variables have emerged as moderators of the illness-provoking effects of stress. Among these are personality variables such as an internal locus of control, interpersonal trust, coping skills, hardiness, and the absence of the Type A behaviour pattern. The first three have been combined by Tyler (1978) into a three-dimensional configuration of individual psychosocial competence.

The literature on the antecedents of these personality characteristics points to the influence of child-rearing practices and early experiences on their development. The importance of family structure in this context thus becomes evident, influencing as it does, the value system, the timing and techniques of socialization, the methods of discipline, and the overall learning environment of the child. Joint and nuclear families each have their own distinctive features which have an impact on the personality of their constituent members. This study, therefore, focused on determining whether college students from joint and nuclear families differ with respect to individual psychosocial competence, hardiness, and the Type A behaviour pattern.

Individual psychosocial competence, as conceived by Tyler (1978) is a three-dimensional configuration of psychosocial characteristics consisting of self-attitudes
(locus of control), world-attitudes (interpersonal trust), and behavioural attributes (active coping skills).

Hardiness has been proposed by Kobasa (1979) to be a constellation of personality characteristics which operates as a buffer against the harmful effects of stressful life events. The specific elements of this constellation are commitment, control, and challenge.

The TABP is a coronary-prone behaviour pattern and is considered to be an exaggerated behaviour style of responding by persons having the necessary predisposing characteristics. The absence of the TABP has been found to moderate the illness-provoking effects of stress (M.D. Friedman & Rosenman, 1974). The three factors of the TABP are speed and impatience, job involvement, and hard-driving and competitive behaviour. As these personality characteristics have emerged as importance variables in the stress-illness relationship, investigation of family structure in relation to their development becomes a matter of practical concern. Information obtained from such an investigation might result in the modification of faulty socialization practices and lead to the promotion of physical and psychological health.

In view of the fact that no study exists on the relationship between family structure and these personality variables, this study would provide base-line data for further research in this area.

The major objective of this study was to ascertain
differences between college students from joint and nuclear families with respect to the following personality variables:

1. The three dimensions of individual psychosocial competence, namely, (a) self-attitudes, operationalized in terms of locus of control, and subdivided into internality, belief in chance, and expectations of control by God and by powerful others; (b) world-attitudes, operationalized in terms of interpersonal trust; and (c) behavioural attributes, comprising of active planful coping skills.

2. Hardiness, and its three personality dispositions, namely, commitment, control, and challenge.

3. The Type A behaviour pattern and its components of speed and impatience, work involvement, and hard-driving and competitive behaviour.

Apart from this major objective, data were also analyzed to determine the intercorrelations among these personality variables and the effects of certain demographic variables on these personality characteristics. Personal information supplied by the students regarding certain aspects of family life was also analyzed to help in the interpretation of the findings.

A review of the relevant literature carried out in the light of the objectives of the study led to the formulation of certain hypotheses. The hypotheses related to the degree
to which the selected personality variables would be observed in students belonging to the two family structures, and have been grouped here for convenience of presentation.

The hypotheses predict that college students from joint families, in comparison with those from nuclear families would:

(1) have less expectations of internality (i.e., less perceived mastery over their personal life), and greater expectations of control by chance, by God, and by powerful others;

(2) have a higher degree of interpersonal trust;

(3) exhibit less active planfulness (behavioural attributes of psychosocial competence);

(4) have less composite hardiness and less commitment, control, and challenge which are the personality dispositions of hardiness;

(5) exhibit less of the Type A behaviour pattern and of its components of speed and impatience, work involvement, and hard-driving and competitive behaviour.

The sample selected for study consisted of 100 students each from joint and nuclear families, matched one to one, on each of the variables of sex, educational level, faculty, educational achievement, income, parents’ education, and caste. The students, both male and female, ranged from
the Eleventh standard to the Third year of college (i.e., five successive year levels) and belonged to the Arts, Science, and Commerce faculties of five Junior and Senior colleges of Pune. They also differed widely with respect to educational achievement, economic status, parents' education, and caste. Married students, foreigners, and hostilities were excluded from the sample. For greater differentiation between family structures, two subsets of the total sample were formed comprising, respectively, of students belonging to large joint families and a matched sample from nuclear families, and data in their case analyzed independently.

Five scales were used for the measurement of the fourteen dependent variables. These were the:

(i) Levenson / Kopplin Control Scales,
(ii) Interpersonal Trust Scale,
(iii) Behavioural Attributes of Psychosocial Competence Scale (Form A R),
(iv) Hardiness Scale (Short Version), and
(v) Jenkins Activity Survey (Form B).

All these scales are reported to be adequately reliable and valid. Items in the Job Involvement Scale of the JAS were adapted for use with the student population and the scale termed 'Work involvement'. All the scales were translated into Marathi by the researcher and either the English or the Marathi version used according to the subject's preference.
A pilot study was first carried out on a small group of students to determine the clarity and suitability of the instructions and of the scale items. On finding these to be satisfactory, the scales were administered to the research sample.

Keeping in view the objectives of the study, certain statistical techniques were employed at various stages of the investigation.

The chi-square test was used to ascertain whether the groups drawn from the two family structures were adequately matched. Normality of the variables was assessed by graphical representation and Bartlett's test used for determining homogeneity of variances. The split-half method, corrected by the Spearman-Brown formula, was utilized to obtain an estimate of the internal consistency of the scales in the present sample. The data obtained from administering the scales were analyzed by the t test, Pearson's product-moment correlation method and analysis of variance. The t test was used to determine significant differences between students from the two family structures on the fourteen dependent variables. Interrelationships among the dependent variables were determined by Pearson's product-moment correlation method, and coefficients of correlation computed separately for students from joint and nuclear families. Two-way ANOVAs were carried out to study the effect of family structure and of each of the controlled variables on personality.
characteristics. Post-hoc comparisons of means following analyses of variance were conducted by Duncan's multiple-range test. Personality profiles for the samples from joint and nuclear families were drawn on the fourteen dependent variables. Finally, the subjective reports of the students were analyzed by the chi-square test to determine differences, if any, in the two family structures with respect to certain aspects of family life. The conclusions drawn from analysis of the data are presented in the next section.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The following findings and conclusions were derived from the present study:

1. Students from large joint families were more internal than those from nuclear families. A similar, though non-significant, trend was observed in the general sample too.

2. Students from joint and nuclear families did not differ with regard to expectations of control by chance, God, and powerful others.

3. Interpersonal trust was observed to be more in students from joint families in the general as well as the large joint family samples.

4. No significant difference was found between
students from the two family structures with respect to the
behavioural attributes of psychosocial competence.

In view of the above findings, it may be concluded
with respect to individual psychosocial competence, that a
college student's membership of a large joint family is
associated with the development of internal control as well
as of interpersonal trust. The latter personality variable,
in particular, is associated with the joint family structure
regardless of the size of the family. Active planfulness
(i.e., behavioural attributes of psychosocial competence),
however, is not related to the structure of families.

5. Hardiness, and its three components, namely,
commitment, control and challenge did not differ
significantly in students from joint and nuclear families,
pointing to these variables being unaffected by family
structure.

6. No significant difference was observed in the TABP
or in its components of speed and impatience, work
involvement, and hard-driving and competitive behaviour.
Development of this coronary-prone behaviour pattern and its
components thus is not linked to family structure.

The correlational analyses carried out to determine
the interrelationships among the components of locus of
control, hardiness, and the TABP, and among the major
personality variables yielded certain significant findings.
A pilot study was first carried out on a small group of students to determine the clarity and suitability of the instructions and of the scale items. On finding these to be satisfactory, the scales were administered to the research sample.

Keeping in view the objectives of the study, certain statistical techniques were employed at various stages of the investigation.

The chi-square test was used to ascertain whether the groups drawn from the two family structures were adequately matched. Normality of the variables was assessed by graphical representation and Bartlett's test used for determining homogeneity of variances. The split-half method, corrected by the Spearman-Brown formula, was utilized to obtain an estimate of the internal consistency of the scales in the present sample. The data obtained from administering the scales were analyzed by the t test, Pearson's product-moment correlation method and analysis of variance. The t test was used to determine significant differences between students from the two family structures on the fourteen dependent variables. Interrelationships among the dependent variables were determined by Pearson's product-moment correlation method, and coefficients of correlation computed separately for students from joint and nuclear families. Two-way ANOVAs were carried out to study the effect of family structure and of each of the controlled variables on personality.
hardiness as well as of composite hardiness and vice-versa. In nuclear families, the former were, in addition, accompanied by low levels of commitment, interpersonal trust, and active planfulness.

13. Students who showed greater expectations of control by God and by powerful others had less composite hardiness, commitment, and control, and vice-versa. Expectations of control by God were also negatively associated with hard-driving and competitive behaviour, but only in nuclear families.

14. More trusting students displayed more composite hardiness, commitment, and control. Trust was also positively associated with active planfulness in nuclear families.

15. Active planfulness and commitment were associated, with an increase or decrease in one variable seen to be accompanied by a change in the other variable in the same direction. The relationship of planfulness with some of the other personality variables, however, varied for the two family structures. High levels of active planfulness were accompanied, in joint families, by low levels of challenge and high levels of the TABP and work involvement; in nuclear families, they were associated with high degrees of internal control and vice-versa.

16. For students from joint families, increases or decreases in sense of challenge were accompanied by changes in the TABP and in hard-driving and competitive behaviour in
the opposite direction.

The ANOVAs for family structure and for each of the controlled variables yielded certain significant findings which are given below.

17. A significant main effect for educational achievement on internality was observed, such that students in the low achievement group were more internal (i.e., had more perceived mastery over their lives) than those in the moderate and high achievement groups.

18. Educational achievement influenced expectations of control by powerful others, with students in the low educational achievement group having greater expectations of such control than those in the moderate and high achievement groups.

These two findings regarding internality and powerful others reveal that the belief in personal control and the belief in control by powerful others are not mutually exclusive but may coexist in an individual. This conclusion is supported by the results of the correlational analyses showing internality to be unrelated to control by powerful others.

19. Sex influenced hardiness, with females found to be more hardy than males.

20. Educational achievement affected the control
disposition of hardiness, with students in the moderate achievement group observed to be more internal than those in either the low or the high achievement groups.

21. A significant effect for caste on the TABP was observed. Students from the disadvantaged castes exhibited more of the Type A behaviour pattern than did those belonging to the Brahmin, Maratha and 'Others' categories.

22. Parents' education had a significant effect on students' work involvement. Those with highly educated parents displayed less work involvement as compared to those whose parents were moderately or poorly educated.

5.3 SUGGESTIONS

The present study suffered from certain limitations, which have been outlined in Chapter 1, section 1.5.3. These related to the nature and size of the sample and to the instruments used. These limitations as well as the nature of the findings obtained, suggest certain directions that future research in this area might take.

1. The predominance of small-sized joint families in the research sample may have been responsible for the non-emergence of significant differences in many of the personality variables studied. A study on similar lines, but conducted on a bigger sample comprising students from large joint families is, therefore, indicated to bring out existing differences in the two family structures.
2. The demands of urban living are likely to obscure many of the hypothesized differences between students from the two family structures. As such, inclusion in the sample of a sufficiently large number of students from rural areas and with traditional backgrounds seems necessary. This might help to accentuate differences and provide insight into those aspects of family life which contribute to the development of the selected personality characteristics.

3. Most of the scales used in this study have not been tried much on Indian populations. Studies using these scales are called for to obtain normative data and also to reveal the applicability of the present findings to samples with different characteristics. Development of tools designed specifically for the Indian population would, of course, be of immeasurable value.

4. In view of the limitations of self-report measures, the dependability of the data obtained through the scales could be increased by the supplementary use of rating scales and interviews.

5. There is a noticeable absence of developmental studies with regard to these personality variables. Such studies would throw more light on the processes by which these variables develop and on the agencies responsible for their development.
6. The findings obtained in this study suggest the possibility of child-rearing practices in the two family structures today differing from those found previously. In view of the scarcity of research in this regard, there is a need for such child-rearing practices to be systematically explored.

7. The present study implicitly assumes the stress-buffering effects of the selected personality variables on Indian subjects. However, in view of the vastly different cultural background and belief systems of the Indian people, these effects need to be independently assessed in the Indian context to determine the applicability of Western findings.

8. Most of the findings obtained in this research point to non-significant differences between students belonging to the two family structures. It thus appears that it might be more profitable to consider the social interactional dynamics that lead to the development of these personality variables rather than to concentrate solely on the form of family as the critical independent variable.