ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the present investigation was to identify mothers' child rearing antecedents of their children's learned helplessness. The objective was also to examine the differences across urban, rural and tribal settings with respect to children's helplessness and attributional styles. In addition, differences on mothers' interactional styles was investigated across these settings. The study adopted a 3 (urban, rural, tribal) x 2 (sex) x 2 (mastery-oriented versus learned helpless) factorial design. 360 children (180 boys and 180 girls) participated in the Phase 1 of the study. One third of the participants were randomly sampled from tribal areas in an around Nilagiri hill areas of Balasore district of Orissa. One third of the children were randomly sampled from adjoining rural areas and rest of the child were sampled from the urban centre nearest to these tribal areas. These children were individually administered a standardized measured of Childrens Helplessness Questionnaire (CHQ) and Projective measure of Helplessness (PIH). The CHQ measured a child's cognitive expectancy that behaviour and outcomes are independent. The PIH presented three stories and thought response in form of agreement and disagreement with a number of statements relating to the characters and events depicted in each story. The PIH generated children's scores with
respect to their helplessness and attributional styles of internality, stability and globality. In addition another measure "Children's Attributional Style Questionnaire" (CASQ) was also individually administered to measure a child's internal, stable and global attributions. On the basis of children's combined performance on two helplessness measures, children in each of the sub groups were categorised into mastery-oriented (MO) and learned helpless (LH) participants. Analysis was geared to examine the attributional style differences across twelve groups. The relationship between children's helplessness and their attributional style was also examined. The result showed that rural and tribal children were more helpless than urban participants; girls were more helpless compared with boys. Rural children indicated greater internal factor in explaining negative (bad) events compared with urban and tribal children. As predicted internality, stability and globality factors explaining negative events were positively related to helplessness. In phase 2 of the study, mothers of these twelve groups were sampled. They were individually administered with Parental Interactional Style Questionnaire (PIS) and Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) measures. The PIS included items with respect to nine interactional styles: authoritarian rejecting, authoritarian not rejecting, authoritative, appeasing, temporizer, harmonious, permissive
and indulgent protective. Each mother was asked to indicate the frequency with which she engages in a particular form of behaviour as indicated by a statement. Furthermore, the attributional style of mothers (ASQ) were also measured in terms of internal, stable and global factors. The comparison of responses of twelve groups of mothers indicated a number of salient findings. Urban mothers indicated higher scores than rural and tribal participants with respect to a number of interactional styles; rural mothers showed higher scores than tribal ones. Mothers of boys demonstrated greater authoritative, permissive and harmonious interactional pattern than do mothers of girls. Mothers of LH children tended to indicate greater authoritarian rejecting and temporizing interactional style than do mothers of MO children. On the contrary, mothers of MO children tended to show higher authoritarian not rejecting, authoritative and permissive interactional styles than do mothers of LH children. Moreover, urban mothers reported greater global attribution in explaining positive events compared with rural and tribal mothers. As expected, boys' mothers indicated greater internal and global factors for explaining positive events than do girls' mothers. These differences in interactional and attributional styles were explain in the terms of sociocultural factors pertinent in Indian society. The implications of findings were discussed the direction for future research were also highlighted.