CHAPTER 3

METHODODOLOGY

‘Social work research is a compassionate, problem solving, practical endeavor’
-Rubin and Babbie 1989

This chapter discusses the methodology used to take a multi-lens view of parental disciplining practices within a changing social paradigm. The views included those of parents, children and teachers in the chosen milieu. In order to understand the mindsets of the parents and the disciplining choices they made in different situations and between boys and girls, to review the observations of school teachers about these disciplining practices and to comprehend and analyse the children’s reactions and views, the researcher decided to adopt the mixed methods research.

3.1. Scope and Method of Research

The mixed methods research approach has molded the design of this study, which aims to help understand the present disciplining practices of parents, who have children in the middle childhood stage, assist in designing training programmes and workshops for teachers and counsellors to optimise their professional skills, support theory building regarding parental disciplining practices in the urban Indian context, provide scope for further research in this field and perhaps, guide parents in adopting appropriate disciplinary strategies for their children.

Mixed methods research uses multiple approaches in answering research questions and is both expansive and inclusive. A study of parents’ disciplining of their children during middle childhood is the focused topic of this research, which means that all aspects of the topic have to be explored to ensure that the research findings are not limited. In order to facilitate better understanding of the topic, the sample had to be large enough to perceive trends. For instance, which disciplining practices were more prevalent? Was it the same for both genders? Such trends would be best described by frequencies, that is, by quantitative methods. At the same time, to explore and understand the depth of these dimensions, qualitative methods would be needed. A review of research methods revealed that the mixed method research was best suited for this study.

A fundamental aspect of mixed methods research is that the method should follow the research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain the most complete and useful answers (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004: 18). Quantitative and qualitative
perspectives have to be examined for each research question in order to choose the best options. This calls for a “bottom-up” approach, that is, the research question drives the mixed method research approach (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner 2007: 122).

According to Clark (2010: 436), another reason is:

‘[….] merging the approaches to increase understanding or develop a complementary picture (…); compare, validate, or triangulate results (…); provide illustrations of and context for trends (…); and examine process/experiences along with outcomes (…). […]’

While some of the questions could probe for an in depth understanding, some others could explore the trends and the independent variables statistically, from which patterns would emerge. Both methods, quantitative and qualitative, were thus seen as important elements in understanding this research. ‘In discussions of mixed methods research, epistemological and ontological issues have been marginalised to a significant extent as pragmatism has emerged as a major orientation to combining quantitative and qualitative research’ says Bryman (2007: 17).

The philosophical base for this study was pragmatism. Explaining pragmatism as a research paradigm, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009: 73) maintain,

‘…it rejects the either-or choices from the constructivism-positivism debate. Pragmatism offers a third choice that embraces super ordinate ideas gleaned through consideration of perspectives from both sides of the paradigms debate in interaction with the research question and real-world circumstances’.

Aspects of pragmatism that are well-suited to this research are

• First, it is the middle ground between dogmatism and skepticism and mainly rejects the dualism in the either-or choices, for example, subjectivism vs. objectivism, rationalism vs. empiricism etc.

• Second, it views research inquiries as similar to inquiries in day-to-day life. That is, researchers like other people, test their beliefs and theories by checking what works, what does not, what solves problems etc.

• Third, pragmatism endorses integrative eclecticism; that is different even conflicting ideas, theories and perspectives can be useful ways of gaining understanding of people and the world (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009).

Based on this understanding and the review of literature, the conceptual framework of this research was created.
3.2. Rationale for the Study

The main objective of this research was to investigate the parental practices of disciplining children in the middle childhood stage. The review of literature shows that middle childhood has several important physical, emotional and social developmental milestones for the child. It is a critical stage in the child’s development marking the transition from pre-school to full time schooling at age six and from middle childhood to pre-adolescence at age eleven. Since disciplining children is one of the core activities of parents, it was thought important to investigate the range of present disciplining practices of parents in a complex urban environment.
3.3. The Research Questions

1. What are the different disciplining practices of parents in specific situations?
2. Are these decisions ad hoc or planned?
3. How do parents decide on who should disciplining?
4. Do parents use different techniques to discipline girls and boys?
5. What are the differences in the disciplining practices of fathers and mothers?
6. How do parental experiences impact their disciplining practices?
7. What are the common problems faced by parents while disciplining their children in the middle childhood stage?
8. What are the children’s reactions to parental disciplining practices?
9. What are the opinions of school teachers on parental disciplining and its impact on children over the last decade?

Based on these questions, the research objectives emerged.

3.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are

1. To study parents’ understanding of disciplining
2. To identify parent related and child related factors that impact disciplining practices
3. To study disciplining practices adopted by parents in different situations
4. To analyse differences, if any, between disciplining practices of fathers and mothers and between disciplining boys and girls
5. To study children’s perception of parental disciplining practices
6. To understand observations/experiences of school teachers about parental disciplinary strategies over the last decade.

3.5. Sampling

*Universe.* Since the sample size was large, the schools and all the biological parents of children studying in the primary sections in the schools in Navi Mumbai (100 schools) were the universe for this study.

*Units of Sampling/Study*

1. Parents of the selected group of children
2. Primary school teachers
3. Children
Choosing the Sample. Work experience in Navi Mumbai equipped the researcher with considerable insights into the life experiences and struggles of families who sent their children to municipal and government district schools. As most were very low income group partially unemployed daily wage earners struggling to make ends meet, it would have been difficult for them to allot time for research queries and it did not seem right to expect them to make the time for the research. After much thought, it was decided not to include this group in the research. To broaden the research, it was decided not to restrict the research to the English medium only and to also include the Marathi medium schools as well in the final sample. Some schools were affiliated to the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) boards and English was the only medium of instruction, hence they were not included in the study. There were some schools with international affiliations catering to the well-to-do class, which were also not included in the study. This study hence decided to choose respondents from non-aided private schools with a middle level fee structure, which were affiliated to the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Board.

Sampling Method. Stratified random sampling method was used to select the respondents. The method of participant identification and sample selection went through a four-tier process.

I. Choosing the schools was the first major round of sample selection. One English medium school and one Marathi medium school were to be selected for the purpose of the research. For the English medium schools, the researcher had to approach three schools before the fourth school agreed unconditionally. Selection of the Marathi medium schools posed no problems.

II. The process was to choose the students whose parents would then be requested to participate in the research. Accordingly, a proportionate stratified random sampling method was used for selection of the sample of students for the interviews. First, the sampling frame, in this case the student roster for each division of each standard was checked and the roll numbers of the boys and girls were noted separately. Since there were five divisions each of five standards (Standard 1 - Standard 5), one girl and one boy were selected from each class of the primary section of both schools.

III. This entire process went on concurrently along with data collection for five months. This was because participation in the research was voluntary. From the first batch of fifty selected samples, thirty-four couples agreed to participate, of whom fourteen couples dropped out due to various reasons - change of mind, work constraints and family and health issues. Additionally, twenty-one couples selected said that the wives would attend, but the fathers refused.
The reasons were that since the upbringing was left to the mothers they would have more to share. In all, 225 were chosen as samples from which the final 100 couples participated. This was a tedious process as care had to be taken to maintain the balance between the parents of girls and boys, and see that there was equal representation of children from all the classes.

IV. The third round was choosing the children for the sample. This was also random sampling. The feedback received from the pilot studies conducted with parents and teachers showed that if the chosen parents were told that their children too were to be interviewed, they invariably would not want to participate and those who did, would give guarded responses. They would worry about cross-checking with their children. It was also expected that the children too would come under pressure from their parents to give expected responses. It was thus decided that the children of parents who were interviewed, would not be chosen. The last set was the teachers’ sample. The only criterion was that the teachers had to have a minimum of ten years’ experience of teaching children in the primary section. Accordingly, all the teachers who qualified participated in the research.

Sample Size and Units of Analyses. Parents: The biological parents of fifty children each from two schools (total 200 parents) in the age group, six to ten years in the primary section formed the units of analyses of this research. There was equal representation of the parents of both girls and boys. Since some were single parents, they were incorporated into the sample. Five of the respondents were young widows and the husbands of fourteen mothers of Marathi medium students could not come for various reasons, which the researcher came to know while interviewing the mothers. The interviews with the mothers were included, but since the number of fathers in the sample size was lower, the sample size of the Marathi medium was increased; hence, there are sixty-three mothers of Marathi medium students.

**TABLE 3.1**

**Composition of the Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Couples</th>
<th>Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Primary</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathi Primary</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers: All senior teachers with a minimum of ten years of teaching experience in the primary section and counsellors with an experience of at least a year were included. However, since one school did not have a counsellor and the other had a counsellor who was a fresher from college, only teachers were interviewed. Altogether, seven teachers from the Marathi medium school, and seventeen teachers from the English medium school (total 24 teachers) fit the criteria.

Children: The final unit of analysis comprised twelve nine year old children from each school (total 24 children), with an equal representation of boys and girls.

3.6. Tools of Data Collection

Each research objective was scrutinised and explored before creating the interview schedule. The researcher was careful to incorporate the theories into the Interview Schedule and scrutinise each objective pragmatically from the quantitative and qualitative angles. The questions were designed to suit a mixed methods approach. The researcher took care to ensure that all the objectives were represented in the data, and that each objective was weighed from all angles and accordingly, given weightage in the Interview Schedule. All the objectives were then explored with questions in the interview schedule after incorporating of theories; Ecological Systems Theory and the Model of Disciplining Styles. Care was also taken to include open end and close end questions, as well as questions which incorporated elements of both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Interview Schedule for Parents. There were two schedules for parents. First Interview Schedule was designed to gather primary information about the parents and their children to create their profiles. The second schedule was the main Interview Schedule, for collecting data relevant to exploring the disciplining practices of parents.

I. The main interview schedule was divided into five parts:

II. Attitudes, Beliefs and Knowledge

III. Impact of living in Mumbai

IV. Experiences- both self and experiences of bringing up their children

V. Disciplining Practices

VI. Personal Skills.

Interview Schedule for Teachers. Unlike the parents’ schedule, this schedule was in one part, but like the parents’ schedule, it had open end, close end as well as ques-
tions which had elements of both. This schedule was designed to capture their opinion about the disciplining practices of parents, to explore the trends in disciplining over the last decade, and to solicit their opinion about disciplining.

**Interview Schedule for Children.** There are several creative and innovative methods of researching with children such as pictures, drawings, sentence completion and writing, the draw and write technique (Punch 2002). The individual and cultural differences between children as well as the experiences of children in spaces, in this case urban space, were considered while designing the tool.

Creativity marked the interview schedule for children. They were given a simple interview schedule in two parts that did not test their writing skills, but gave scope for self expression. The first part had a short questionnaire in the form of two contextual vignettes and the second part was a visual task based activity.

They had to respond to the two vignettes with their opinions. Both the vignettes were simple, easy to understand and everyday situations that they could relate to. One of the protagonists was a child in their age group and the other, a younger child in a situation that they may have experienced or would have seen some other child, even a younger sibling experience. Identification with the situation was thus easy, and yet, since it was about someone else, it was not too close to make them uncomfortable. These also corresponded to the first two cases of the parents’ interview schedule. Three questions were asked and the questions were common to both vignettes. The questions were carefully scrutinised for clarity. They were

- What do you think his mother and father would say to him?
- What do you think his mother and father would do to him?
- If it were a girl instead of a boy, would the mother and father say and do the same things?

The second part was a visual task based method. The visual is always an important part of the everyday life of children, especially the urban child who grows up watching cartoon shows on television; many of them are comfortable with video games and the internet as well. Hence, a cartoon of a spider was created and each of its ten legs drawn as dotted lines represented one common disciplining practice. Each group was asked if there was anyone who feared spiders and if so the researcher would draw something else they wanted. All the children were fascinated with the fat cartoon spider and more than happy to work on it. The children were asked to join the dots on the legs with a red pen if that practice was experienced often, with blue if used less by the parents, and if the child had not experienced a particular practice, she/he was asked to leave it alone. Those who
wanted to share something regarding disciplining were asked to write at the bottom of the schedule and on the reverse. Those who wanted to colour and add to the drawing of the spider were allowed to do so after finishing the main work. Before they started, all of them were reassured that their responses would not be shared with the parents or their teachers.

3.7. Process of Data Collection

_Pilot Survey._ First, a pilot survey was conducted among the adult caretakers of children - senior teachers and parents with children in the age group, six years to eleven years, to gauge the feasibility of the research topic. The two objectives of this survey were

- To get their opinion on whether the topic under consideration was important enough to be taken up and whether the topic would contribute to child welfare
- To explore the different dimensions of the problems faced by parents while disciplining children.

Both sets were asked if they felt this topic was necessary or if they thought any other topical issue regarding children needed to be taken up.

Four senior teachers, (Section Coordinators and Principals) each with over twenty years of experience teaching in three schools, were interviewed. All four felt that it was an important topic of research. The teachers outlined the problems faced at home and in school, which according to them were outcomes of faulty/insufficient disciplining practices, early onset of puberty, increased and indiscriminate viewing of television, and increase in tuitions and lack of physical exercise, working parents who devote little time to their children and the increased incidence of divorce among parents.

Next, an E-Mail survey was conducted with parents. Of the ten parents who were approached, four agreed to participate and were sent a survey form via e-mail. Three of them filled the forms. All three believed that the topic was important and that relationships with peers and behaviour with family, followed by studies were the main areas of concern. They added that they were confused at times about what was right and what was wrong in disciplining practices and were also concerned about the impact of the environment on the child.

_Pre-testing of the Tools._ Both the parents as well as the teachers’ Interview Schedules were pre-tested on seven parents, two of whom were peer and all of them gave their feedback in writing. The parent and teacher schedules were tested with the English as well as the Marathi translation of the tool. Majority felt that the schedule was lengthy but necessary. In the light of the feedback, the schedule was simplified and certain precautions were taken regarding approaching and convincing the parents. Similar testing
was conducted on the teachers’ interview schedules where four teachers; two each from the English medium and the Marathi medium schools participated. The major suggestion from the teachers was that the tool needed to be shortened, as teachers had little time to spare amidst their busy schedule. Two children participated in the pre-testing. Informed consent was taken from the parents and the children before the process, where it was stressed that their contribution too was important and that feedback from them would help in improving the tool and conducting research easier.

The children’s feedback was vital in tuning the tool. They said,

“The spider is nice.”

“It would be more fun if we can colour and change him or write what we want.”

“We can take part in this activity. Our parents have to do so many things to make us nice people!”

**Data Collection.** Data collection with the parents and teachers commenced on 8th September 2012 and was completed on 25th January 2013. Appointments were given to each participant as per his/her convenience. This meant that most working people chose a before or after working hours appointment, or a holiday. The participating persons were interviewed by the researcher; some chose to write in the schedule themselves in the presence of the researcher. Care was taken to ensure that the couples did not influence each other’s responses. The interviews lasted between one and a half hours and two hours each for the parents, and the teachers finished within one hour. The children were interviewed in two sessions, one in each school, lasting one and half hours each. These were conducted in August and September 2013.

3.8. Ethical Considerations and Challenges

**Participant Consent.** Participant consent is an important aspect and vital for research and hence has to be procured ethically. It is:

‘[…] The process of informed consent is designed to ensure that research participants understand the limits of their participation, and their awareness of any potential risks. In particular they should be informed about criteria for selection, their right to withdraw from the research, what their role in the study will involve, and the intended outcomes of the research. […]’ (McCrystal 2008: 91).

The purpose and the process of this study was clearly outlined and shared with the respondents and also with the concerned school authorities and their permission sought in writing for conducting the research in the schools. Children participated after consent was obtained from the parents, school authorities and the researcher sought their permission too.
Participant consent was linked closely to the choosing of the sample. All the participants chosen were sent a sealed informed consent form. This form had two parts. Part 1 comprised ‘participant information’ wherein information regarding the research was outlined in detail. The information sheet was signed by the researcher. Part 2 was the ‘participant consent’ form, which the participants had to sign and give the optional dates and time suitable to them, if they consented to participate. Those who consented were reassured by the researcher over the phone and in person before the interview commenced. This worked very well with the parents of English medium children because follow-up was easy; if the forms were not returned in three days, a new batch of participants was chosen, no questions were asked, yet some chose to share the reasons for not participating, which were also documented. Those parents who were unsure or did not like the idea of a consent form, decided not to participate and there was no scope for discussion. All the parents of children from the English medium who participated signed the consent form. A few asked for copies of the forms they had signed, which was given to them immediately.

However, with the Marathi medium school, a different strategy was chosen based on earlier feedback. The researcher was given half an hour on the first ‘Open Day’ of the academic year in June 2012. Parents chosen by the random sample method were requested to stay behind for that half hour. Thirty of them stayed back for the meeting where the researcher explained the purpose of the study, their role and the content of the participant consent form. All of them said that they would not like to sign anything, while eighteen of them said that they would like to participate without signing. They did not mind signing on the interview schedule after it was completed and read out to them, while some read it themselves. Most of the hundred and seven participants of the Marathi medium signed the schedules; two mothers were technically blind and one was uneducated and could not sign. The researcher did not want her to go through the ignominy of the situation and hence told her that fingerprints were not needed, thereby bringing to focus the cultural context, which always should be kept in mind during research. The teachers too were given consent forms and all the teachers with ten and more years of experience gave their signed consent.

The process of obtaining the consent for researching with children from the gatekeepers; parents and the school management was not difficult, as it was the last set of data collected. While some of the gatekeepers were amused, a few were perplexed and two even approached the researcher requesting that the consent from children not be taken as the adults had already given their consent. It is important to note here that not a single gatekeeper of the children was willing to either accept or sign any information/consent form for the child. The researcher thought it prudent to convince all of those who had doubts first, as the process of informed consent is the first step towards ethical research.
Once the adults were convinced that consent from the children too was important, two groups were formed, one for each school and the children were brought together and the researcher explained the entire process and its purpose, as well as the tool in half an hour. In the first group, one child mentioned that adults never ask children what they think about their own work other than their opinion about food and clothes, so the child asked candidly why their opinions were being taken. This was a good starting point to describe the research topic, its significance, the process, the need to take the opinions of children and finally the method of dissemination of information after the research was done. This was accepted well by the children. With the second group, the children were not really interested in the briefing or in the consent discussion as they had seen the researcher for the three months that data was being collected in the school and were comfortable with her (in the first school, the data collection was in a room away from the classrooms and playground, hence the children had rarely seen or noticed the researcher).

**Confidentiality.** Confidentiality in research has different connotations for adults and children. The cultural context too makes a difference in the understanding of confidentiality. The researcher was aware that collectivistic cultures have more difficulties in understanding the confidentiality of individuals and hence maintaining it was the first thing that the researcher discussed and each participant, including each child, was reassured. A few parents did try to inquire about the responses of the spouse, which had to be handled firmly and diplomatically.

With children, confidentiality in a traditional system is difficult to enforce, as there are several adults who may not approve of it. Further, complications can occur when this confidentiality that the researcher is trying so hard to maintain, may need to be breached when the health, mental and emotional stability and the life of the child is at risk. As Gewirth (2001: 482) mentions, ‘A central issue of confidentiality arises in contexts where significant harm may result from maintaining it’. The researcher should be prepared to deal with such a situation with sensitivity, compassion, patience and intelligence. Again, children are enthusiastic, trusting and free of inhibition when rapport has been built, which should be a cause of caution for the researcher to avoid researching anything that was not planned for. Two children did open up and wanted to share - one about another child’s problems in his home (that child was not part of the group), another about a boy ‘misbehaving’ in class. Both were firmly asked to confide in their teacher or parent, after which no more unplanned topics cropped up during the sessions. This was probably the most difficult part of the research.
3.9. Other Challenges

1. The data collection began with the parents of the English medium children who were reluctant to have the researcher writing for them in an interview format. Some said that they would be more comfortable writing for themselves, whereas a few said that they would not have the time to read through what was written for them and hence would participate only if they were allowed to write on their own. The researcher spoke to the other parents before the interviews, and all of them said the same thing. With the Marathi medium children’s parents, it was different. All of them wanted the researcher to write for them. Their reasons were lack of confidence and inability to write coherently. The researcher let the parents decide the mode of data collection. However, there was complete uniformity with the process; each participant sat separately with the researcher on a one-to-one basis, none of them took away the schedules, and the researcher gave the entire background of the research to each of them verbally, answered their questions prior to the interview, and clarified their doubts during the process without giving them any leads. Each of them was also asked about his/her comfort levels and none of them left without a closure to their experience.

2. It was suggested that the children interviewed should not be the children of the parents interviewed as this would put pressure on both the parents and the children.

3. The entire process of obtaining data was challenging:
   - Selection of data was tedious, keeping in mind the composition of the group. This was all the more challenging as participants who dropped out had to be replaced.
   - Getting appointments for the interview called for patient negotiation and time management.
   - Two of the mothers were visually challenged and one of the fathers was house bound, hence three of the interviews were home visits.
   - Since all the fathers and some of the mothers were working, several appointments were after 7 pm, a few going right up to 11 pm, some early morning or on Sundays and holidays. This made the working hours for data collection very erratic and therefore, physically challenging.

4. Four of the mothers and one father were seen to be in need of mental health support, two of the mothers in dire need. The reasons were loss of spouse and marital conflict. Soon after data collection, the researcher met them individu-
ally, their mental health was explored and they were referred for help. Two of them have followed up and are in much better health; two will need extensive marital counselling for which the spouses are not ready and one has remarried happily.

5. The dimension of neglecting disciplining practices as per the model of disciplining practices (described in Chapter II), was not explored with the parent respondents. Traditional cultures do not accept neglect of a child as the parenting role is taken seriously, hence exploring this element directly would have led to predictable responses from parents. However, along with other practices, neglectful practices were explored with the children and the teachers the findings are in the relevant sections.

6. Disciplining practices of parents are not static and will change for different situations; however, they may not elicit the same response to a similar situation each time. Further, some parents may not have any fixed opinion about a particular situation or may not/will not want to use only one practice. In such cases, parents would use a combination of practices they thought were the most useful. Therefore, whenever any of the respondents in this research, had marked a combination of practices, it has been mentioned as ‘mixed practices’.

3.10. Data Analysis

Since most of the data was categorical the statistical significance among selected variables was determined using the Pearson’s chi-square test (level of significance 0.05) using statistical software SPSS Version-20. Answers to open-end questions were collated into emerging themes and then tabulated as uni-variate, bi-variate and multiple response frequency tables. Demographic data of the parents were also analysed using the Pearson’s chi-square and Fisher’s Exact Test (level of significance 0.05).

The next Chapter four presents the Research Findings: Part I- Impacting Forces.

Note:* All procedures related to data collection as well as all the tools of data collection are inserted in the annexures.