CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“In literature and in life we ultimately pursue, not conclusions, but beginnings.”
— Sam Tanenhaus

6.1. Summarising Research Methodology

The main objective of this research was to investigate the disciplining practices of parents of children in the middle childhood stage, a critical stage in child development; the transition from preschool to full time schooling at age six and from middle childhood to preadolescence at age eleven. The researcher set out to explore the various aspects of disciplining practices of the parents, their perceptions and opinions, the impacting forces from the parent’s immediate Micro systems and Macro systems and their actual practices. The study also aimed to understand the opinions and experiences of children and teachers.

The overarching base theory of this research is the Ecological Systems Theory, from which emerges the Ecological Systems Theory of Parenting that describes the ecological forces impacting disciplining practices. The Model of Disciplining Styles is used for the study of the actual practices. The three together can also be seen as an integration of theories. All of these are described in detail in the review of literature (2.6., 2.7.). These theories were used right from the conception to the final analysis of the findings. The other theories mentioned in the review of literature were also referred to at appropriate places in the findings and in this chapter.

This was an exploratory study using mixed methods. Mixed methods research uses multiple approaches in answering research questions and is expansive and inclusive, which suited this research. The broad objective of the research was to study the disciplining practices of parents of hundred children in the age group, six to ten, in the city of Navi Mumbai. The biological parents of fifty children each from two schools; an English medium and a Marathi medium (total 203 parents) were the units of analyses, and supplementary information was collected from a sample of twenty four children and twenty four teachers.

The research was limited to parents of children in non-aided Secondary School Certificate (SSC) affiliated schools in Navi Mumbai, from the English and the Marathi medium language of instruction. The teachers and children were also from the same school.
The children interviewed were not the children of the interviewed parents. The rationale for this decision is presented in the Chapter on Methodology (3.5.). This was a completely voluntary exercise and the researcher had gone to great lengths to reassure participants in writing as well as verbally about confidentiality as well as the importance of their sincere participation to the findings.

**Objectives of the Research**

1. To study parents’ understanding of disciplining of children
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.

The findings and analysis are presented here in two sections. Section 1 presents the factors that impact disciplining choices and Section 2 investigates the disciplining practices of parents. The six objectives of the research which are outlined are presented as per their location within these two sections.

**6.2. Summarising of Findings**

This section summarises the key findings from the six objectives of the research and is followed by the overall Conclusion, before the Recommendations for the future are suggested.

**Section 1: Factors that Impact Disciplining Choices-Summary of Findings**

Every act of disciplining has a past as well as an immediate background to the practice, all of which are rooted within the layers of the Ecological Systems of the parent. These factors are capable of impacting the disciplining practices. Findings of three objectives are presented here.

Three objectives that are relevant to this section are

1. To study Parents’ understanding of disciplining children
2. To identify Parent related and child related factors that impact disciplining practices

3. To understand observations/experiences of school teachers about parental disciplinary strategies over the last decade (some sections of the data relevant to this part).

Profile of respondents. First, the respondents had to be understood. Children whose parents were interviewed- There was no significant difference in the distribution of male and female children - there were marginally more boys (Marathi medium 57% and English medium 53%) than girls. It was part of the research design to have an equal representation of girls and boys as samples, and all attempts were made towards this. Though there was no attempt to keep out adopted children, only one child from the English medium was adopted. There was no statistical significance in the birth order of children whose parents were interviewed as the majority of children in both sections were second born (46.0% in each). However, the difference is that first born children comprise the second largest number in the Marathi medium (27.0%), whereas it is the single child in the English medium (30.0%). While none of the children from the Marathi medium were planned, 58 per cent of the English medium children where planned. Regarding the health of the children, (25.4%) of them from the Marathi medium and (12.0%) of the English medium children had problems in the first crucial year of birth and during the research, a small number of (7.9%) of the Marathi medium children had health problems. When behaviour problems were investigated, 12.7 percent of the Marathi medium and 18 per cent of the English medium children were seen as having behaviour problems by their parents. This is followed by a look at the profile of the parents of these children. Parents - Two different socioeconomic groups were identified as part of the study in order to provide a broad base to the research. Statistical analyses of the demographic/primary data were significant in the differences between the two groups of parents. Two hundred and three parents were interviewed; 96 parents from the English medium and 107 parents from the Marathi medium. The parents of Marathi medium children were significantly younger; less educated, had more children and most worked in the informal sector and had lower incomes than most parents of English medium children who worked in the private sectors. There were also significantly larger numbers of children from the Marathi medium who lived in nuclear families and who had only their parents as caretakers. This was because a large number of parents of Marathi medium children were first generation migrants from rural Maharashtra. The statistically large number of differences that emerged between the two groups of parents, made a compelling case for a cross-sectional analysis. Children interviewed- The children interviewed were not the children of the parents who were interviewed. There were no differences in their profiles as the number of children and age group was
predetermined. **Teachers**- Seven teachers from the Marathi medium and seventeen from the English medium qualified for this research, having completed ten years of teaching in the primary section. All of them were female respondents. There was a difference in the age composition of the two groups, as the Marathi medium teachers were overall younger.

**Objective 1: To Study Parents’ Understanding of Disciplining Children—Key Findings**

The main concern and focus of the parents’ understanding of discipline was to make the child obedient, to imbibe and practice the values, expected habits and behaviour of the community and to fit into a globalised world. They believed that extreme authoritarian practices were not good, yet half of them approved of some of them, while many approved of permissive practices. More mothers focused on the expected daily life behaviour and habits of children. The responses from teachers were more or less similar to those of the parents, except that they laid more emphasis on the role of the parents in preparing the children for successfully facing a technologically driven world. The purpose of this objective was achieved as it gave the entire range of meanings from euphemisms to generalisations about disciplining, which were individual and culture specific and included the realities of the different profiles of the two groups of parents. It also corroborated what the review of literature discussed— that disciplining describes a range of practices used by parents to teach the child the normative behaviours of society.

**Objective 2: To Inquire into Parent Related and Child Related Factors that Impact Disciplining Practices — Key Findings**

Parents’ experiences of being disciplined as children were first explored and it was seen that parents have had largely authoritative experiences as children. Yet, in the qualitative section, many shared the impact of negative experiences on them, while some described coercive and controlling practices of their parents in a positive light. This highlights an important aspect of disciplining, which is ‘normativeness’ as described in the review of literature.

Several areas of the relationship were explored - most of them said that they were satisfied with their marital relationship, 50 per cent of them admitted to conflict due to differences in opinion about disciplining (a large number of them being parents of English medium children), and many of them chose to stay silent when asked about the personal characteristics that impact discipline.

Next, the immediate contextual factors were examined. There were more ad hoc practices of the mothers and more planned practices of the fathers. While the parents of
Marathi medium children had more planned and ad hoc practices, the parents of English medium children were less inclined towards any one practice exclusively.

Major areas in the environment were examined for the challenges that they posed to parents in disciplining the child. While television was the most influential, internet, video games, peer groups, books and comics were the least influential. Yet, together these influences were not seen as a major threat by the parents and most said that the challenges posed by them were well within their control.

Various stressors associated with living and working in a congested metropolis like Mumbai were examined for their impact on parents’ disciplining practices. Surprisingly, the largest number, more from the Marathi medium and more fathers, were never stressed. The overall impact of stress levels on their children was also low. However, while inquiring whether they felt the need to strengthen their disciplining practices, a large number of parents shared that they indeed feel the need to do so, especially to control their temper and its consequences, thus revealing that their stress levels were higher than they admitted or were aware of.

While grading self in disciplining skills and the ease of disciplining children, it was an average experience for both areas. However, most of the parents of Marathi medium children marked themselves ‘excellent’. For most parents, the reasons given for their choices for any grade were largely dependent on their level of success in making their children obedient, while some mentioned the temperament and the characteristics of the child and the average skills of the parents leading to the lower grades.

Finally, a number of parents, especially the mothers, felt the need to strengthen their disciplining practices. The mothers of English medium children were worried about disciplining the child in an increasingly technologically driven consumerist world. They also mentioned dealing with behaviour problems and difficult personality traits of children. Many parents, more from the Marathi medium, stated that they needed to make changes within themselves to control bouts of anger and frustration and use of abusive language. The causes for these were; managing the children largely alone, personality and behaviour of the children, personality differences of parents, interpersonal relationships, stress of life in Mumbai, bicultural identity and other contextual factors; like pressures from the joint family or being single parents.

Section II- Disciplining Practices of Parents-Summary of Findings

This section presents the findings of the disciplining practices of parents as shared by them. It also includes the experiences of children of being disciplined by their parents.
and observations of teachers. This section gives a detailed overview of the disciplining practices of parents.

The four research objectives relevant to this section are:

• To study disciplining practices adopted by parents in different situations

• To study children’s perception of parental disciplining practices

• To analyse differences, if any, between disciplining practices of fathers and mothers and between disciplining boys and girls

• To understand observations/experiences of school teachers about parental disciplinary strategies over the last decade (some sections of the data relevant to this part).

Objective 3: To Study the Disciplining Practices Adopted by Parents in Different Situations- Key Findings

The parents’ section examines the different aspects of their practices - frequencies and changes, styles in different situations and problems in disciplining.

Levels and types of disciplining were examined, and it was seen that overall more parents were strict in their level of disciplining, followed by mixed responses. While the parents of Marathi medium children were stricter, the parents of English medium children were somewhat lenient. Regarding the style, most parents were flexible in their disciplining, but parents of Marathi medium children especially the fathers, had more fixed practices. The mixed responses were lower here.

The frequency of disciplining was investigated and it was seen that it was between medium and high in the key areas. There were very few who never disciplined children. The responses showed that parents were vigilant and had chosen areas of immediate concern for deciding on the frequency of disciplining. An inquiry was made about the overall and specific changes made by parents in the disciplining practices adopted, compared to their own experiences of being disciplined as children and the reasons for these changes. Less than 40 per cent of parents had made overall changes, among who were many parents of Marathi medium children. The intergenerational transmission of practices, as discussed in the review of literature, describes this trend. Within the specific areas of daily life which were investigated, there were more changes made for the children’s achievements rather than for their relationships with others. In each of the areas explored, some parents mostly those of Marathi medium children, who said that they had not made changes, had actually made ‘small
changes’ as the original practices had to be tweaked to suit changed times. Three daily life situations were presented as hypothetical case studies and parents’ opinions about each case as well as the best disciplining practices according to them were explored. Overall, authoritative responses were the most, followed by a mix of the three practices. The parents of English medium children had more authoritative responses and the parents of Marathi medium children, especially the mothers, more of mixed combination practices. An analysis of this section shows that practices differ with the situation and the age of the child. Parents are more likely to use authoritarian disciplining practices when the situation has occurred in a public place and they are also more likely to be more authoritative in practice with a younger child, even if they are angry and irritated. Finally, in each of the cases, parents had more authoritarian thoughts which reduced in practice, demonstrating that parents make attempts to change their practices; from angry and irritated thoughts about the situation to more authoritative practices in actuality, as well as make changes to suit the situation and changing times. Parents were also asked to share if they had problems in disciplining children and if so what they were. This was an open-end question and the findings were; eighty per cent of the English medium children and sixty eight per cent of the Marathi medium children, whose parents were interviewed, were seen to be problematic to be disciplined by them. The numbers were equally divided between girls and boys in both sections. The statistically significant differences between the two mediums can be attributed to the following reasons; a) Many Marathi medium fathers had not responded b) More parents of English medium children had differences of opinion on disciplining and a large number of them chose to remain silent to differences not being reconciled, which created conflict and impacted practices.

Most parents had problems in disciplining children due to the behaviour, personality traits and manipulative practices of children. Whereas for some parents, it was their own failure to deal with difficult situations, and for a few, it was the joint family system and single parenthood. These large numbers however, do not indicate that parents are unable to disciplining their children (very few have indicated so) but rather point to the difficulties encountered, which they surmount, albeit with a lot of effort.

Objective 4: To Examine and Understand the Differences, if any, between Discipline Practices of Fathers and Mothers and between Disciplining Boys and Girls-

Key Findings

Both areas of gender differences in disciplining children were studied; the differences between the disciplining practices of mothers and fathers, and the differences, if any, between disciplining girls and boys. Overall, sixty eight per cent of the parents, more from the Marathi medium than the English, felt that the practices between the mother
and father differ. While mothers were seen as more controlling and nagging, they were also seen to be more understanding and patient and trying harder than the fathers to discipline their children. A larger number of parents also felt that fathers were no stricter than mothers. This was an unexpected finding as fathers are supposedly stricter as per popular belief.

More than fifty per cent of the parents of Marathi medium children (more fathers) felt that there were differences in the disciplining of boys and girls, whereas less than twenty-five per cent of the parents of English medium children felt the same. Overall, fewer parents believed that there were differences in disciplining boys and girls, compared to those who believed that there were differences in the practices of mothers and fathers.

This objective was achieved as there were clear insights gained; that there were differences in the disciplining practices of mothers and fathers, and in the practices used by them for their daughters and their sons. However, these differences are largely seen in the responses of the parents of Marathi medium children due to which there was a statistically significant difference between the responses of the two groups to both sections of the gender inquiry.

Objective 5: To Study Children’s Perception of Parental Disciplining Practices—Key Findings

Twenty-four children were respondents to gain insight into their perceptions and experiences of disciplining practices of parents. Girls and boys were included in equal numbers for the interview to study if there were gendered differences in responses. Equal numbers of children from both the mediums were included to check for differences in responses between the English and Marathi medium children. Responses from children were explored in two ways. First, there was an open-end question with two hypothetical common situational cases of young children, which would be familiar to them either on first-hand experience or having observed it with siblings or peers. These were simplified versions of the first two cases presented in the parents’ section. The children were asked what the parents would say and do in the given situation and whether parents would react differently if it were a girl. The second question was closed end, but with a creative activity that dealt directly with their experiences.

For the first question, the Marathi medium children, especially the boys, had marked many more authoritarian experiences. The Marathi medium boys had marked no experience of authoritative responses and it was the same with most of the Marathi medium girls. Those children who gave mixed responses, described

- how parents start with one practice and end with another
• mention one practice and act on another (these were the most)

• one parent using one type practice and the other parent using another (these were the least).

Overall, girls had marked more experiences of mixed practices. This pattern was seen in the responses to both the cases in the first section. When the responses of the children were compared to the responses of the parents to similar situations, it was seen that the children had marked more authoritarian practices and fewer authoritative practices. There were more instances of combination practices and no permissive practices marked by the children.

The gender differences were that boys had marked more authoritarian practices, while girls had mentioned more mixed practices. The difference between the English and Marathi medium was also obvious. While the Marathi medium children, especially the boys, mentioned more authoritarian practices, the English medium children spoke of more authoritative and mixed practices. A very small percentage of children said that parents would not use the same practices with a girl because “girls do not throw tantrums in public and do not get beatings”.

In the second question, where children shared their own experiences of being disciplined, it was seen that boys had more experiences of authoritarian, permissive and neglectful practices and unlike other children, all the Marathi medium boys had experienced fault finding, and around fifty per cent of them had experiences of being neglected or their behaviour overlooked. But the English medium boys were the largest number who had no experience of authoritative practices. A large number of English medium boys and a few girls had no experience of their parents explaining to them lovingly and forgiving their mistakes. Again, more children from the English medium were made to feel ashamed as compared to the Marathi medium children. The English medium children overall, have fewer authoritative experiences. Girls, especially, the Marathi medium girls had the most experience of authoritative practices. Boys seem to experience the entire spectrum of practice styles, whereas girls seem to be in the middle.

An overview of both sections of this objective revealed that the disciplining experiences of boys and girls were not similar. The boys, especially the Marathi medium boys, experienced more vacillation of practices, for example, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful practices than the girls; the girls were disciplined authoritatively with a few experiencing all four practices occasionally. The English medium boys were controlled more and parents were less forgiving when the expectations were not met.
There were differences in the responses of the children in the two sections. In the first section of hypothetical situations, very few children said that there were differences in the disciplining of boys and girls, in the second section when it came to sharing their personal experiences, the differences were apparent. The purpose of this objective was to understand the perspective of children regarding the disciplining practices of their parents as experienced by them. To this extent, the purpose was achieved as the findings gave a clear perspective - that girls and boys are disciplined differently and that there are differences between the children studying in the English medium and those in the Marathi medium.

Objective 6: To Understand the Observations/Experiences of School Teachers about Parental Disciplinary Strategies over the last Decade- Key Findings

Teachers are in a position to observe and experience many aspects of parental disciplining practices and their effect on the children. Their responses, which gave a clear observer insight into the disciplinary strategies of parents and the changes that were observed by teachers in the last decade are encapsulated below.

The most frequent areas of parental disciplining were in studies, learning to adhere to the values of the family and larger community and age specific self-care and self-responsibility. Regarding gendered differences, the opinions of the teachers from both mediums to this question differ. While most Marathi medium teachers felt that there were differences, less than 30 per cent of the English medium teachers felt the same. Regarding the sharing by children about their disciplining experiences with their teachers, the ones most often shared were their experiences of positive practices. Among the negative practices, being nagged by parents was shared the most and the most common feeling shared was sadness. Children felt sad the most when they were beaten, spanked, shamed, threatened and when promises made to them were not kept. Children felt considerable confusion over neglect, isolating and spanking. Some children were indifferent to some of the negative practices of the parents. Teachers also shared the disciplining practices observed by them on various occasions. Largely they witnessed abusive practices and instances of loss of self-control, with few witnessing positive responses. Regarding knowledge and observation of excessive punishment by parents, some chose silence while some described and gave an indication that excessive abusive punishment is not a rare occurrence. These disciplining practices of parents, which are either stress induced and reactionary or sometimes habitual, could contribute to the coercive cycles of interaction between parent and child leading to problems in disciplining children.

The teachers gave their opinions on how the disciplining practices of parents varied in five different family situations. A lot of the variations in the disciplinary strategies
of parents in the areas mentioned were seen as being due to traditional cultural aspects. For example, societal discrimination of single mothers made life more challenging for them than for single fathers, the disciplining practices of parents was diluted in joint families due to the role and importance of elders, and the cultural norm of obedience and hierarchy which meant that the older child lead and the younger child followed, puts pressure on both.

Finally, teachers expressed that a lot had changed over the decade in the disciplining practices of parents. Better education of parents had not necessarily benefited the English medium child as parents are busier but it had benefited the Marathi medium children as illiteracy among parents had reduced. Relationships and lifestyles too were affected as parents today encourage individuality and competitiveness in all areas including even with friends and in hobby classes. However, they felt that fear of parents and teachers had reduced, rapport with children had increased, punishment had reduced and children were more open and frank with their parents, which some felt had made the children difficult to control and discipline.

6.3. Conclusion: An Overview of Findings and Reflections

The findings from the research of parents’ disciplining practices for their children and the impacting forces that determine the practices, are seen here within the overarching base theory of this research; The Ecological Systems Theory. Our understandings become more significant when they are seen within broader perspectives. The two Principles of the Ecological Systems Theory will explain the relevance of the impacting forces. The principle of ecological transitions tells us about the shifts in roles or settings of individuals, from one developmental stage to another. This also brings about changes in their activities depending on their role expectations. While the principle of interconnectedness states that all human transactions are the product of the direct and face-to-face communication and information that exists between individuals. Disciplining practices of parents would thus shift and change with each situation as the environment around the parent and the child would be in a fluid ever changing state. The environmental forces experienced by parents and children would in addition impact the communication between them. There are other dimensions which are part of the Ecological Systems of parents and children which are mentioned briefly here.

As investigated and explained by several researchers and scholars (for example, Hamner and Turner 1990, Lefrancois 1990, Siegelman and Shaffer 1995, Bainham, Sclater and Richards 1991, Bornstein 2001, Kagitcibasi 2005, Kakar 2008, Tuli and Chaudhary 2010, Raval and Martini 2011), parenting and within that the disciplining practices are social constructs, formed out of the broad historical, socio-cultural, po-
litical and economic ecology of the parents and their children. Within this, structures of family and community life determine child related practices. Clearly then, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, there are several determinants of parenting which have to be considered to understand the impacting forces; the determinants as well as the actual practices of the parents. The following reflections on the findings, reiterate the position, that parenting and within that their disciplining practices for their children, are ethnocentric concepts where collectivistic cultures like ours value interdependence and obedience from children.

The first reflection of the findings is regarding the profile of the parents. These seem to be impacted by two major forces, which are:

a. The social stratification which a) prevented a large number of the Marathi medium parents from completing their education and kept them impoverished and deprived of basic necessities of quality living and b) skewed development especially the urban/rural divide adding to the problems. This has led to the fallouts generally expected in such situations, mainly; poor nutrition, unemployment and early marriages. Due to this, many of the Marathi medium parents migrated to urban areas for better prospects whereas some of them migrated from urban areas and from within Mumbai; from slums and cramped chawls to rented homes in Navi Mumbai with a determination to right the wrongs of their own existence; a society in transition. This has led to the statistically significant differences between the Marathi medium and the English medium parents.

b. The age cohort which meant that these parents, especially those of English medium children, have a bicultural identity and are on the cusp of major socioeconomic changes whereas their children are born into the changes.

Social stratification and a society in transition, besides the bicultural identity of the age cohort of the parents are thus major impacting forces.

The second reflection is that Indian society should also be seen from the perspective of the impact of role expectations on the parents, as described in the role theory of parenting. This explains the societal norms that create gender specific tasks, and within those, the goals for various roles; mothers, fathers, grandparents and so on. There were gendered differences in the opinions of parents (more so from the Marathi medium), teachers and children. A few examples; the number of working mothers were not large and more of them were homemakers. Besides, their definitions of what constitutes disciplining were largely around the expected behaviour and habits of children, as mothers feel the pressure of strong cultural norms that make them responsible majorly for the disciplining. Mothers were also seen to be the ones who
were more in charge of the disciplining of the children with the fathers pitching in when; the situation was out of control, or when the mother was ‘incapable and too soft’ or the division of labour for disciplining was divided with the ‘inside the house daily disciplining’ done by the mother and the ‘outside the house more important disciplining’ done by the fathers. Further, there were responses from parents that indicated that watchful control of girls was important for their ‘future prospects’ but the same was never said about boys. These differences had ramifications as is expected, due to the intergenerational transmission of practices, on the differential practices of parents for girls and boys. Though when comparing these to the differences in practices between mothers and fathers, they were seen to be fewer, pointing at the impact of the environmental factors on the age cohort of the parents which was encouraging at least some of them to see the genders as equal. Of course, it was also possible that for several of them, attitudes were softer towards younger children (as indicated by their responses to the hypothetical situations) and also that gender based differential practices are not so apparent in the middle childhood stage, but as they grow older, the differences between disciplining boys and girls become more apparent. When the disciplining practices experienced by the children were analysed, it was apparent that there were indeed differential practices experienced and it matched the findings from the parents. The findings reflected that the Marathi medium boys were probably not watched carefully, and went through a whole spectrum of practices where they were first left to their own devices, and told to behave themselves when there was a problem, failing which, they were punished. They had also experienced all the parenting styles including neglect, more than their English medium counterparts and the Marathi medium girls. The English medium boys were controlled and pushed the most among all the children, but this kind of controlling was not seen in the responses of the girls from the English medium indicating that parents were more concerned about the achievements of their sons. The girls, more from the English medium were watched vigilantly and not given the leeway to make the mistakes that the boys made and possibly monitored more closely. This suggested that with the boys, disciplining was more curative and with the girls, it was preventive. Finally, most teachers who themselves were women, were seen as responding with stereotypes when they mentioned that children were better behaved and better looked after by home maker mothers, they disapproved of working mothers and directly connected negative child outcomes with the absence of mothers in the home, in a sense pointing to the role of the mother as the responsible parent for expected child outcomes. These differences in disciplining practices would be contributing to the problems faced by parents in disciplining their daughters, especially if one sees that half the number of children who were seen to be difficult to discipline by their parents from both the English medium and the Marathi medium were girls. The differential practices would be unac-
ceptable to some of the girls as they are more exposed to information and knowledge, making them resentful of attempts to correct and ‘control’ them and treat them differently for their male siblings. This would probably be the reason why they are seen as part of the problems mentioned by parents; where parents have to repeat instructions and ensure they are followed, or when they are seen as stubborn and difficult to make obedient.

Thirdly, this particular age cohort as mentioned earlier in the profile of parents has seen the most transformation due to the rapidly changing world of modern technology. As described by Arnett (2002) this has led to the bicultural identity in most people, part rooted in their own culture and part in the global culture, increasingly so with present children and youth. For some, confusion and resentment due to blurred identities leads to aligning with their own socio-religious group rejecting global culture, whereas some are not able to straddle the two cultures successfully and for some, experience, knowledge and awareness gives them the edge to understand the situation and make the adjustments needed to successfully straddle both the worlds. Several of the responses in most sections pointed to these aspects, for example; while there were parents who were aware that they had to discipline their child in a way the she/he would adjust to, and form a bicultural identity, there were several parents who insisted the children should be inculcated with the religious practices, the language and the expectations of their community. Some had stated that they did not believe their children needed friends or needed extracurricular activities just as their own parents did not allow friends, nor any activity outside of the school for them as exposure to the outside world would spoil children.

Fourth, India is in a social transitional stage. There have been environmental changes in the lives of the parents during their early adulthood which continue. Human right movements, increasing technology, migration and changing family structures have placed parents on the cusp of these changes, especially the technological ones that have escalated in the era of the birth of their children. Within the Indian context, these impacts have been felt more strongly due to the disparity in development and modernity between rural and urban life, pushing impoverished families into urban areas, which impact the very fabric of families. At the same time, the cultural roots remain for all families, thus creating strong push and pull factors. These dimensions are seen reflected in some of the responses of parents and teachers. For example, in their definition of disciplining, parents have stressed on ‘obedience’, ‘respect for all elders’, ‘respect for the cultural practices’ or shared their fear that children should not lose their ‘cultural identity’ etc. whereas the teachers have also mentioned the same and in addition have mentioned ‘respectful relationship with parents’ or have rued the fact that children are friendly but do not have the ‘respect for teachers and consider the teachers as friends now.’
At the individual level, the Ecological Systems Theory of Parenting (2.6.) describes the three areas in the personal life experiences of the parents which have bearing on their practices - their psychological resources that depend on the interpersonal relationships of the parents, their sources of stress and the characteristics and behaviour of the child. There appears to be insufficient introspection and reflection regarding the impact of their personal lives and their stress levels on their practices. Both have a bigger impact than they state, as the responses of parents to some of the open-end questions showed higher levels of stress than their responses to the closed-end questions.

In addition, there are a number of factors that increase stress levels, which impact on disciplining practices and detract from positive outcomes. To mention some; nuclear families of especially Marathi medium children whose parents further have very little support in terms of advise or help in caretaking of children, for some parents (50%), conflicts arising between them due to differences of opinion regarding disciplining and problems in interpersonal relationships. Education, experience and being older gave the parents of English medium children an edge in understanding the avenues open to children for their future and they were also aware of the competition in every field, and hence the need to be focused and competitive. This was perhaps why they emphasised on the inculcation of good habits and behaviour, whereas the parents of Marathi medium children wanted to understand the global world and changing lifestyles and hence focused on the role of parents in disciplining children.

Finally, all the aspects discussed above; parental experiences, social stratification, migration and social transition, specifics of the age cohort of both parents and children, the bicultural identity of parents and the gendered differences are all part of the ethnocultural niche of the parents studied and should be seen as an integration of experiences and the determining forces from within the Ecological Systems of the families. Since the number of children who are seen as difficult to discipline are large, a special mention needs to be made here about the combination of forces which could be leading to the situation. This could be best explained as seen in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 encapsulates the findings which explain the large number of children who are seen as difficult to be disciplined by their parents. The figure is self-explanatory and has been culled out from the findings, discussions and the conclusion which precedes this figure. The next section discusses contributions from this research to the field of understanding the disciplining practices of parents followed by the Recommendations which will tie up the research, suggesting a way forward.
FIGURE 6.1
Causes for Problems in Disciplining Children

*Note*: Sometimes, these dimensions would be working separately, but most of the time they would be working in permutations and combinations making it difficult to identify the source of the problem.

*Source*: Created by the researcher based on the findings from the research.

6.4. Conclusion: Contribution of the Research to the field of Understanding Disciplining of Children

As can be seen in Chapter two the Review of Literature, various indigenous and cross-cultural studies by Indian as well as researchers from other parts of the world, have been conducted to understand disciplining practices of parents in India.

This research has explored as many dimensions as possible regarding the disciplinary strategies and practices of parents and the influencing forces. This research has
reiterated some of the findings from earlier research as mentioned in the Review of Literature which are:

- **Normativeness.** Earlier studies have pointed out that there exists normativeness in disciplining practices. This was seen in the present research too as cutting across the two groups of parents studied, there was clear indication that disciplining was the tool to ensure obedience and inculcation of the child into the expectations of the larger community as well as what the particular age cohort of the parents thought to be important.

  Gender differences both practiced by parents and practiced on children, which was seen in several studies mentioned, was also seen in this research.

  India specific studies and papers reviewed and mentioned in the Review of literature highlighted the goal of emotional socialisation of children to teach them to control emotions and expressions which were not considered appropriate. This aspect was seen throughout the present research; in their definitions where they spoke of ‘control of self’, to the behaviours they mentioned as inappropriate due to which they had problems in disciplining children, to the need they felt to strengthen their disciplining skills where one of the areas where skills were needed according to some, was to help children to become less emotional and more controlled.

  Though a large number of parents did mention that authoritarian practices were not right, a large number did feel that several of these practices, for example spanking a child and repeating instructions till the child obeys were acceptable, and further several such practices were acceptable for use sometimes. This too reiterates findings from previous research about parental practices in collectivistic/traditional cultures.

  **This research in addition, has added to the field of knowledge.** This study has added to the understanding of the causes; the impacting factors on disciplining practices of parents which have been less researched in the past as compared to the child outcomes of disciplining practices of parents. This research gives an overall ecological systems perspective to the field by thoroughly exploring a large number of dimensions to the impacting forces of the disciplining practices.

  - The research gives insights; not only that the socio-economic differences in different groups lead to differential outcomes, but also the age cohort of parents demonstrates that there are certain commonalities in their understanding and practices in spite of significant differences otherwise, and these are an important aspect to keep in mind when working with parents and children.
• The research points to the fact that though parents do have goals/desired results for disciplining their children (in this case, parents have mentioned three which have been described in detail in Chapter 4), their practices were geared towards achieving obedience, rather than achieving the desired results. That is, the insistence on obedience was creating a bottleneck and it appeared that for most parents, it was the one step solution to a range of situations where children needed to be disciplined. This; reduces the impact of the practice, does not achieve the results, dilutes the results or leads to only temporary change. This is one of the major reasons for perceived problems in disciplining children due to which efforts get derailed.

• This research has also demonstrated that a sociological perspective is as important in understanding disciplining practices of parents for their children as it is to understand it from the psychological perspective.

The complexities of the intertwining forces both in the influencing forces and the subsequent practices, highlight that every disciplining act has a history and cannot be seen in isolation. Consequently, the efforts of parents have to be appreciated and recommendations to assist parents to strengthen their disciplining practices kept in mind.

6.5. Limitations

This research throws light on general perspectives and an overview of the field of disciplining of children in the middle childhood stage. However, in actuality, the practices would change depending on situations and at different points of time. The findings may not also hold good for different age groups of children and strata’s of society. India being a highly stratified society, inclusion of all the socio-economic classes in a research study by a single researcher was not feasible as there would be many different variables to be researched.

However, the findings from this research indicate that there is much scope for research to get a complete overview of all strata’s of society as well as a possibility of research regarding the problems faced by parents in disciplining children in each childhood stage as well, so that a comparative study is possible and knowledge can be gained to develop more child friendly and child centred strategies. It is also a pointer to the possibilities for parental education regarding disciplining and its effects.
6.6. Recommendations

“The life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”
— Soren Kierkegaard

Theoretical understanding and self-reported data from parents, children and teachers, have shown that discipline means different things to different cultures and within them, to age cohorts and individuals. For example, punitive practices like physical punishment are not necessarily seen as rejection in many cultures like ours, and in fact may be seen as motivating the child to conform to the values of the culture as the self same experiences shared by many parents. However, there would be a need to draw a line when these practices are seen within the perspective of Child Rights.

One message that emerges from this study is that there is need for parents to acknowledge and accept the changing social context in which they are raising their children. Disciplining practices have to modify and become more cooperative, based on mutual respectful negotiations.

The recommendations to this research are:

**Defining Disciplining of Children**: Building on the goals of parenting as described in the Introduction, the definitions of disciplining that were articulated by parents, the findings of this research, the needs of the child and the definitions from the review of literature, the researcher proposes the following definition of disciplining for use for the child in urban India:

**FIGURE 6.2**
Defining Disciplining of Children by their Parents

“Disciplining is the continuous process of understanding, evaluating and accepting the developmental and individual needs of the child and with the participation of the child, creating a positive and supportive environment using skills of proactive disciplining to; strengthen desired habits and behaviours, help the child become well adjusted to the global world, eliminate undesirable and ineffective behaviour, all the while consciously keeping the best interests of the child at the centre of the interactions”.

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This definition will be now seen in its various sub-parts, around which will be built
the overall recommendations of this research.

Recommendation for Interventions for Strengthening Disciplining Practices of
Parents

‘... They need words that convey feelings, responses that change moods, state-
ments that encourage goodwill, answers that bring insight, replies that radiate re-
spect’ (Ginott: 193).

The recommendations for interventions keeps in mind the realities of the profile of
the parents and their present disciplining practices, the needs of the child and the par-
ents, and concrete suggestions that will make a difference.

Understanding the Child

The suggestions for parents would naturally flow from the definition of disciplining
suggested (figure 6.2). Parents would need to understand the developmental mile-
stones and the related tasks, and the needs of their children. Along with this, they
would need to understand the emotions of children, which are similar, but not the
same in intensity and expression as those of adults. Parents would need to see their
child as an individual with specific individual needs and concerns, capacities and
aptitudes, likes and dislikes, personality characteristics, and variations in innate mo-
tivations. They will need to know the sources of anxiety, stress and anger in children.
This will help them understand the child and then work around this to build on the
strength of the child.

Understanding the Self

I. Parents need to start with understanding the ecology of parenting. Not all
parents are consciously aware that every interaction with the child has a
background both immediate in the personal spaces of the parent and in the
impacting forces of the environment. Parents will thus need to understand
the Ecological Systems Theory and its corresponding Ecological Systems
Theory of Parenting.

II. Parents would also need to understand themselves, their personalities, mo-
tivations, the impact of their interpersonal relationships on their lives, their
needs and how they are met, their own aspirations and its impact on the child.

III. Parents would need to be consciously aware of their disciplining practices
and their impact on children.
IV. An important part of understanding would be ‘self time’ for both parents and children. What stood out from the responses, and was obvious during the data collection stage, was that children are extremely busy. Their lives are like clockwork of adult driven academics and activities both inside and outside the school, leaving them with very little free time to be children and enjoy childhood. Putting the child back into childhood seems extremely important. Having the time to think and ponder and the space to get in touch with the self is very important for children because they are the recipients of disciplining practices. Parents it appears, including the mothers who are homemakers, have tight schedules. They too need to learn to make time for themselves; to relax, to think over things and make well informed and thoughtful decisions. All this requires time. The researcher is reminded of this apt poem:

LEISURE

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.
No time to turn at Beauty’s glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.
A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare. – Davies (1911)

Areas of Development of Disciplining Practices

Accepting

I. To begin with, parents will need to know and understand the rights of the child and that there is and will be, zero tolerance for abusive and trauma inducing in the child, no matter what the provocation. Before limits are set out for the child, the parent will need to absorb and accept unconditionally that there are limits on them as well because the child is not ‘owned’ by them. The role of the parent as a guardian and a caretaker will have to be emphasised.
Understanding

II. Next, parents need to understand that there is a clear connection between the disciplining practice and the outcome, and that harsh disciplining; permissiveness and neglect most often have only negative outcomes. Harsh, coercive and permissive disciplining may produce the immediate outcomes desired by the parents, but these cannot be sustained and there is either a repeat of the situation (which has been described by many parents in frustration ending with ‘just does not understand and has to be told the same thing again and again!’) and/or there is an increase in the intensity of the situation the next time round.

III. Parents need to know that when they make a commitment, promise or state limits on the child, they have to be followed through and if for some reason they cannot, the explanation has to be given to the child clearly and unambiguously so that the parent does not unknowingly encourage noncompliance and/or oppositional behaviour.

IV. Various issues surrounding disciplining will have to be understood and explained – hyper-parenting, sibling rivalry, impact of the media, and role of peers (all of which were issues raised and mentioned by the parents in their responses).

V. The Model of Disciplining Practices will next be used to help parents understand the different disciplining practices and their outcomes as well as the permutations and combinations (mixed practices were prominent in the responses, but their outcomes depended on several aspects) and their effects. Responsiveness and Demandingness, two important aspects of this model, have to be explained and incorporated into this understanding.

VI. The Attribution Model of Parenting as described in the review of literature, delineates how parents form inferences about typical developmental milestones and expected behaviour and then make causal attributions and inferences. Parents would need to know to make accurate inferences based on their knowledge of child development and understanding of their child’s needs to avoid misunderstanding their child’s motives and intentions. This will help in using appropriate practices.

Evaluative

VII. Parents have to be facilitated in learning skills to evaluate situations as and when they occur, not lose their control of the situation and choose the best practices to deal with them in an inductive fashion.
Participative and Supportive

VIII. Parents would need to use positive, participative and inductive practices consistently. They will need to be made aware of the “upper” and “lower” limits of tolerance, which is reciprocal between parent and child. The review of literature explains The Control Theory of Parenting in detail (2.6). It states how reciprocity between the parent and child can get impacted when either one reaches the upper or lower limit of tolerance and if this is not understood and controlled, it could spiral into an increasingly complicated and intense coercive cycle of interactions, which more often than not deteriorates into excessive and punitive control by the parent or the child trying to extricate himself/herself at all costs. Prevention, in this case, is better than the cure as coercive cycles form patterns of behaviour that can go on into adulthood.

IX. Considering that the larger numbers of children are growing in nuclear families and a majority of the children have only their parents as caretakers, it would be necessary to encourage parents to start support groups where they could meet regularly and thrash out issues and learn newer ways of dealing with situations. These groups can be anchored by professional counsellors/social workers to streamline the group process and activities.

X. Specific Skills. In addition to the above, keeping the stage of childhood in mind, a different set of skills are needed for children in the middle childhood stage because there is ‘…considerable change in the child’s physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development.’ (Holden 2010: 184). For example, considering that the child’s environment is expanding to include school and peer and consequently, develop skills towards daily life activities, ‘the nature of disciplinary practices shifts during this time from parental regulation to mutual co-regulation and then to self-regulation by the child.’ (Holden 2010: 191). This would have to be explained and contextualised for parents to accept that there would be a need to gradually change the practices.

At this stage, there is also the possibility of a major change in the family structure, the birth of a sibling. This can change the child’s behaviour depending on how the child perceives or is prepared for the new arrival and the other possibility being the presence of an older sibling. As mentioned by some parents when they spoke of the problems in disciplining children, sibling rivalry is one of the reasons that parents have problems in disciplining children. Parents thus would need inputs in dealing with the disciplining of more than one child in the home.
Gendered differential practices and their outcomes, will have to be explained and understood by parents as these do not have the same impact on their children compared to what they themselves had experienced. Well entrenched patriarchal mindsets will require sensitive yet firm handling to unpack the thoughts that keep this mindset alive and to facilitate new ideations for the parents. This is an issue which should be included and should run through the entire workshop/training as it is important to initiate new thought processes in parents.

Considering the developmental milestones as described in the review of literature, another aspect to be touched upon, should be the monitoring of the child. Monitoring though necessary for children will have to be done differently for this age group as compared to the time when the child was younger as the thrust of the child is towards independence. Therefore age specific child needs based training will also have to be imparted to the parents.

XI. Finally, many skills will have to be explained to parents to be used in different situations, for example; disciplining in public places, disciplining for various situations like studying, play time, TV time, peer pressure etc, relationships with siblings and elders etc. And other situations that crop up from time to time. There are various different skills to be explained to the parents for each of these situations.

**Recommended Intervention for Training Teachers, Counsellors and other professionals working with children**

Workshops and training programmes should be conducted for teachers, counsellors and all other professionals working directly with children, for example, those working within the government Woman and Child Development departments, the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), day-care workers etc. to explain the findings and their implications for the future, and to impart understanding and skills not only to help the child but also to enhance and strengthen the practices of parents.

Besides an understanding of child psychology and child development and the various aspects and dimensions of disciplining, these training programmes should consist of facilitating an understanding of the socio-cultural aspects of parental practices; social stratification due to class, caste and geographical ecologies of communities and families, which would create differential developmental milestones in children and the cultural contexts in which they are brought up, all of which has to be understood. This
aspect is not included in most types of workshops and training, especially for teachers and counsellors where the emphasis is largely on psychology. All knowledge and information available has to be part of the course but has to be contextualised to Indian realities to better facilitate a sound understanding and equip them with the needed skills of their work.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

- The scope of this research was extensive and multifaceted exploring disciplining of children in the middle childhood stage by parents, even at the level of Mumbai city. The findings from the research open up the possibility of further research in the different aspects of the impacting forces on disciplining of children.

- There is scope to conduct correlation between practices and outcomes on children, based on the findings from this research.

- The problems the parents face in disciplining children can be explored further.

- There should be research of disciplining practices of parents for each strata of society, besides other geographical areas in the country - rural, semi-urban and remote locations. This will help in giving an overview of parental disciplining practices in India for children in middle childhood.

- There is also similar scope for research on the disciplining practices of parents for all age groups of childhood.

- Further, research can be conducted with children and all adult stakeholders who come in contact with children on a regular basis; family members, school teachers and other functionaries in schools, counsellors, functionaries in crèche’s and play groups etc. This will widen our understanding of disciplining.

- Keeping the rights of the child at the centre of any research is a critical aspect of researching with children. This is easier said than done. It is recommended that institutions that conduct research and/or have research students should conduct at least a short workshop or have a few sessions on researching with children, with emphasis on tools of research as well as understanding ethical concerns, both which are different when researching with children.

In summation, it was tempting to prescribe one single ‘dose’ of what should be done to correct and perfect the art and the science of parenting mentioned in the first chapter. However, the researcher accepts that there are no ‘single doses’ because every
parent and child is different besides life experiences are always in a fluid state hence there can be no single prescription for success in disciplining children. However, parents and other stakeholders working with children need to know that there are basic benchmarks that have to be kept in mind and that they have to be aware, introspective and be ready to work on self and practices whenever there is a need to change. Parenting and within that disciplining practices, are like the boards one sees all the time on the streets of Mumbai; ‘Work in Progress’! As Honore (2008: 278) mentions

‘[....] Sure there are some basic principles that hold true across class and culture: children need to feel safe and loved; they need our time and attention, with no conditions attached; they need boundaries and limits; they need space to take risks and make mistakes; .... They need to be ranked and measured less; .... They need room to be themselves.’

The researcher is optimistic that with concentrated effort, parents can be empowered to deal with their children better, to the benefit of all. Parents rarely go out of their way to harm their children. This is a belief based on past work experience as well as the earnest participation from parents who had nothing to gain from this research, except the faith that they were participating in an attempt to make life better for their children. It is important for parents to remember that being compassionate, sensitive and sensible and keeping the child in the centre of the situation always is what will define good parenting, because, “There are two lasting bequests we can give our children. One is roots. The other is wings” (Hodding Carter Jr.) At the end of the day, everything we do for our children will have to keep only this in mind - we keep them rooted to live their lives as socially conscious, responsible and giving human beings, and at the same time encourage them to soar confidently into the sky, to reach for the stars, on their own strength.