SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER IV

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The Theme

There is an abundant crop of literature in the field of developmental psychology, which examines the various dimensions of social competence of children and the factors that facilitate or hinder the development of social competence. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of home environment, community setting, socioeconomic background and cultural factors in the early development of social competence in children. Parents’ guidance, understanding, emotional support and trust as well as the types of discipline employed by parents are among the crucial factors affecting the child’s personality and social competence. In one of the landmark studies in the field, Baumrind (1971) developed a three-system model of parental authority and sought to determine how each type of parental behaviour influenced the social competence. The most significant finding of this elaborate study, based on the observation of inter-personal and social behaviour of children in the nursery school was that authoritative parents are most likely to facilitate the development of social competence via responsible and independent behaviour. This study has inspired numerous scholars in different cultural settings to investigate the relationship between parenting styles of behaviour and social competence of children. The present investigation titled, "Social Competence of Children and Parenting Styles of Employed and Unemployed Mothers" is a case in point.
Objectives and Hypotheses

The present study has attempted to ascertain if and how social competence of children is related to the occupational status of mothers and the types of parenting behaviour they followed. The objectives have been:

1. To find out the factors influencing parenting styles of mothers,
2. to identify the factors influencing social competence,
3. to describe the relationship between parenting style of mothers and social competence of children and,
4. to compare the social competence level of children of mothers engaged in different kinds of occupations.

The hypotheses tested included the following:

a) Parenting styles of mothers affect the social competence of children.

b) Maternal employment is related to social competence of children.

c) Social competence is influenced by variables such as mother's education, age of the mother, income, place of residence, type of family and sex and birth order of children.

Variables

The two key variables studied were parenting style of others and social competence of children. Parenting style was the independent variable and social competence was the dependent variable. As social competence is a complex social-psychological characteristic, a number of variables, other
than parenting style, such as maternal employment, mothers' education, income of the family, place of residence, type of family, sex of the child and birth order of the child were included as control variables in order to see whether the original relationship between the two key variables was affected.

The Method

As the major focus of the study was to ascertain the relationship between parenting style of mothers and social competency of children, the design of the study included mainly identification of the dominant parenting style of mothers, measuring the social competence of children and relating these two variables while controlling for a number of other variables like education of the mother, occupational status of the mother, kind of employment of the mother, sex and birth order of children and place of residence.

The parenting style of the mother was studied by employing a Parenting Style Inventory. The inventory had 27 statements and it was given to both mothers and children. For the final analysis only the mothers' responses were considered. Based on these responses mothers' dominant parenting style was assessed. The inventory had high validity and reliability.

The social competence of children was studied by using the Social Competence Rating Scale. This scale had 36 statements reflecting various forms of social competence with three levels of agreement. The scale was given to mothers, children and teachers. For the final analysis, only mothers' rating was considered. The social competence scale had a high validity and
reliability. Each of the 36 statements was rated on a three-point scale indicating high, average and low competency. The score values corresponding to high, average and low competency were 2, 1, 0 respectively. A composite score for each respondent was obtained by adding the scores.

The participants in the study included 451 children and 451 mothers. They were selected by purposive sampling method. They included both from urban and rural residents.

The child participants were of both sexes. The number of boys was nearly two and a half times more than the girls. Most of the children, that is 70%, were in the age group of 13-14 years. There was equal number of participants from rural and urban areas. Majority of them were from nuclear families. The children were of different birth orders and the highest number was from among the first-born.

The sample included 451 mothers who represented different educational levels ranging from primary school to post-graduation. Nearly one third of the mothers were illiterates. Majority of the mothers were unemployed. Those who were employed were engaged in assorted jobs and worked as agricultural labourers, washer women, weavers, mill workers, petty shop owners, teachers, nurses, doctors, engineers, lecturers in colleges, etc. Among the employed, the majority belonged to unskilled job category.

The age of the mothers ranged from 30 to 45 years. Majority of the mothers was above 35 years of age. Most of them were from low income
families. In short, the respondents represented diverse socio-economic background.

**Major Findings of the Study**

**Parenting Style of Mothers**

The commonly prevalent parenting styles were identified as authoritative and permissive. Mothers following authoritarian style were very few (3%) in number. There was almost equal number of mothers adopting authoritative and permissive parenting styles. The proportion of children with high social competence was more than twice the number among permissive mothers than among authoritative mothers.

The pattern of assessment of parenting style by mothers and children was similar. However, more children than mothers assessed the mothers to be authoritative and more mothers than children assessed themselves to be permissive. For the purpose of the study, only mothers’ assessment was considered.

There was significant association between social competence and parenting style. High social competence was related to permissive parenting style. Low social competence was more associated with authoritarian parenting style than others.

There was not much difference between employed and unemployed mothers in their parenting style. However, among the employed mothers,
there were more authoritative mothers and among the unemployed there were equal percentage of authoritative and permissive mothers.

Nearly equal percentage of both employed and unemployed mothers reported all three parenting styles. Employment status did not influence parenting style.

The kind of maternal employment was not found to influence parenting style. There was almost equal percentage of professional and unskilled mothers who were authoritative. Permissive mothers were highest in number among white-collar mothers. Authoritarian mothers were found only among the unskilled.

Parenting style was influenced by educational level of the mother. The higher the educational level, the lower was the percentage of authoritative mothers. Conversely, there were more permissive mothers among the highly educated than among the less educated mothers. Authoritarian parenting was more or less the same among all educational levels.

Age of the mothers did not influence parenting style. However, in the case of permissive parenting style there was age-wise progression in the percentage of mothers. The highest percentage of permissive mothers was in the age group of 41 to 45 years.

Family income was found to be a major factor influencing parenting style. Authoritative mothers were lowest in number among medium income mothers but the highest percentage of permissive mothers was found among
medium income families. Authoritarian style was found more among low income families than among high or medium income families.

As far as place of residence was concerned, there were slightly more (52%) authoritative mothers in rural areas than in the urban areas. Similarly, there were more (53%) permissive mothers in the urban area than in the rural area (43%). However, the difference was not statistically significant.

Among mothers from nuclear families, there were more authoritative mothers than permissive mothers. Among mothers of extended families, there were more permissive mothers than authoritative mothers. The relation between type of family and parenting style was found significant.

Sex of the child was not found to influence parenting style because nearly equal percentage of mothers of boys and girls reported all the three parenting styles. However, mothers were slightly more authoritative towards female children. Parenting style was different by birth order of children. The highest number of authoritative mothers was found for the third and later born children. And the number of mothers adopting authoritative parenting increased birth-order-wise.

**Social Competence of Children**

Assessment of social competence did not vary with the person who made the assessment. Mothers, teachers and children assessed children largely to be of medium level competence and almost an equal number was placed in high and low competence categories.
Irrespective of the employment status, mothers assessed social competence of their children exactly the same way. However, there was wide variation in social competence among children of mothers of different occupations. The higher the occupational level, the higher was the social competence. Likewise lower category of mothers’ occupation reflected lower social competence. Similarly, educational level of the mother also influenced social competence of children. The higher the educational level of the mother, the higher was the social competence of children. Most of the children with low social competence were found among illiterate mothers.

Age of the mother did not influence social competence. However, high social competence was associated with high income of families. Similarly, low social competence was associated with low income families. Clearly, income of the family influenced social competence of children. Place of residence was also found to influence social competence. High and medium level competence was found more among urban families than rural families. Children of low competence were more in the rural area.

Type of family, sex of the child and birth order of children did not influence social competence according to statistical measures.
Effect of Control Variables

The introduction of control variables to test whether these variables influenced the direct relationship between social competence and parenting style yielded the following results:

Controlling for kind of employment, it was observed that the original relationship between social competence and parenting style completely changed. The original relationship was found to be conditioned by the kind of employment of the mother. Similarly, introduction of mother's education as a control variable proved that the original relationship was not real. Same results were obtained when family income, place of residence and order of birth of children were controlled.

Conclusions

Valuable insights have been gained from the findings of the study with regard to parenting style, social competence and mothers' employment. Parenting style of mothers was found to influence social competence of their children only when these two variables were directly related. When control variables were introduced, the direct relationship changed. Hence it might be concluded that social competence is influenced not only by parenting style of mothers but also by other variables like maternal employment, family income, mothers' educational level, sex of the child, place of residence, type of family, etc. This conclusion is in line with the developmental perspective that a child's development is influenced by the interaction of the many factors that surround the child. The implication is that social competence, which is in itself a multidimensional concept, is affected by a host of social, psychological,
constitutional and environmental factors. Parents and teachers should keep this important factor in mind while planning programs for enhancing social competence of children. No single formula, however well intentioned, can create a healthy social environment. The best equipped nursery school or a well-balanced curriculum in elementary school can only accomplish so much. Society must also invest in mothers' education, infrastructure facilities in the rural areas and family support systems and services.

The second hypothesis that maternal employment is related to social competence of children has been disproved by this study. Employment status per se did not influence social competence but the kind of maternal employment did. This is a significant finding. What matters is not whether the mother works or not but what type of work she does. Obviously, a mother who is a casual labourer or a farm worker cannot be expected to bring the same resources, attitudes or social competence as a professionally employed mother. The study points up the fact that a better-employed mother can foster better social competence in her children than an unemployed or poorly employed mother. This finding implies that neither the quantum of time the mother spends with the child nor the mother's exposure to outside world alone helps or hinders the child in the development of his social competence. There are variables other than maternal employment that influence the development of social competence. The child's interaction with his environment including his siblings, peer group and people of importance to him and the richness of his environment may have a bearing on the child's social competence. Hence there is need for taking into consideration different contributing factors rather than a single factor as maternal employment in assessing social competence.
This finding is further strengthened by the results from the confirmation of the third hypothesis.

The third hypothesis assumed that social competence is influenced by income of the family, mother's education and place of residence, and the results have confirmed the hypothesis. The other variables, namely, type of family, age of the mother, sex of the child and birth order of the child did not influence social competence. Thus the most significant finding of the study is that the kind of employment of mothers, mothers' education, income of the family and place of residence are positively correlated with parenting style of mothers and social competence of their children.

Although this finding comes as no surprise to scholars and development specialists, its implications are, nevertheless, far-reaching. Consider the two central questions posed in this study: What are the factors that influence parenting styles of behaviour? What conditions facilitate the development of high social competence in children? As for the answer to the first question, the present study singles out four factors: family income, type of employment of the mother, mother's level of education, and place of residence. Now, it is obvious that these four conditions are inter-related. To have a good income, the mother must have a good job, and to have a good job, she must have better education. Therefore, in the final analysis, the mother's education holds the key to unlocking the development potential of her children. The study points up the fact that an educated mother with a decent job and reasonable income can create suitable home and community environments necessary for the healthy development of her children's
personality and social competence. Therefore, a nation that commits itself to the well-being of its children must first invest in the education of the girl child. Development literature has already confirmed that female education is a crucial factor in economic growth, population stabilization and overall national development. Now, the present study establishes, in no uncertain terms, the importance of mothers’ education in the efflorescence of the children’s personality and high social competence. Development planners and policy makers need to take note so that special emphasis may be placed on the education of the girl child.

Another variable that has emerged significant in the development of social competence is the place of residence. As expected, urban areas offer better opportunities for women’s education and employment as well as provide other environmental conditions favourable for the development of children’s social competence. This finding points up the need for better infrastructure facilities as well as employment-generating enterprises in the rural areas. As long as rural areas lag behind in development, and mothers and their families have to be content with little or no education, low income and limited employment opportunities, the prospect for creating suitable home and social environment conducive to personality development and high social competence is dim indeed. Since the children of today are the leaders of tomorrow, the nation must invest heavily in rural social and economic development and bridge the gap between urban and rural sectors.

The study has also raised the basic issue of defining different parenting styles. Many researchers in Western countries have reached the conclusion
that authoritative parenting is ideal for the development of social competency among children. But the present study has brought out that it is the permissive parenting style that is associated with high social competence. This puzzling finding sets the stage for discussion on evolving culturally relevant terms for defining parenting styles. It is possible that in the Indian context, authoritative and permissive parenting styles overlap. The presence of older relatives in the home or the community and also the important role of older siblings affect the nature of parenting styles or at least the way children perceive them. In any case, the major conclusions of the present study are in line with the mainstream perspectives in developmental psychology. They are:

1. Warm and nurturing parents are more likely to have children who feel good about themselves.

2. Mothers who combine warmth and acceptance with reasoned explanations for rules of discipline are likely to promote high social competency in their children.

3. Mothers who live in urban areas and have better education and well-paid jobs are able to create favourable social environment for their children's growth and development.

These conclusions, generally speaking, endorse the following guidelines for child rearing practices offered by Christopherson (1934).

1. Behaviour and relationship with others depend on the extent to which the child's basic needs are met.

2. Recognize that each child is a unique individual.
3. The faith, honesty, confidence and affection between the parent and child affect the quality of parent-child relationship.

4. Parents should separate the worth of a child from his behaviour.

5. The child should be allowed as much freedom as possible to make mistakes and discoveries but to do so with safety and respect for the rights of others and social convention.

6. Parents should arrange the environment to encourage pro-social behaviour.

7. Parents should be ready to lend support directly or indirectly through physical and verbal guidance.

Implication for Parent Education

The study has brought out clearly that authoritarian parenting style is high among low income and low educational status mothers. There have been many studies, which have brought out the disadvantages of authoritarian parenting on child's personality development. The results of the present study have shown that it is mostly children of the deprived class that suffer the disadvantage of authoritarian parenting. Comparatively speaking, mothers of this category have less chance to learn about the effects of different parenting styles. Because of this reason schools and universities as well as Parent-Teacher associations may arrange for parent education on different parenting styles. Such an effort would enable parents to provide an enabling environment for children of poor sections.
The necessity for parent education has been brought out by yet another finding of the study that parenting style, social competence and mother's employment are all related to one another. Parenting style in combination with many other maternal variables including her education is seen to influence social competence. As there have not been many studies in India on these aspects, parent education on these aspects would be highly beneficial.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The present study has focused only on the parenting behaviour of mothers. The inclusion of paternal variable, that is, a comprehensive study of the parenting styles of fathers and mothers, may be a significant dimension for further research. Similarly, in the Indian context, it may be desirable to include the role of older relatives and siblings in the parenting style inventory.

Further research is also needed to ascertain if there is a trivariate relationship among parenting styles, social competence and academic achievement.

The present study has been unable to give a clear profile of parenting style in terms of qualitative aspects. Future research need is indicated here. No information is provided as to what kind of authoritative behaviour and permissive behaviour is expressed by mothers. A study throwing light on these aspects would be a good complement to the present study.
The study at present, at its best, is only an exploratory one into parenting style and social competence. Having the present findings as the base, large scale studies may be carried out which may fill the lacuna in research on parenting styles.