
UNIT 1: CHILDHOOD (PART-I)

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to -

- discuss what is meant by childhood
- discuss the concept of socialization
- describe the role of family in socializing children
- discuss the importance of parent-child relationship in socialization and
- describe this effect of child rearing practices in different societies.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the course *childhood, child development and learning*. In this unit we shall discuss about the constructs of childhood. We shall also discuss some of the important topics like the concept of

childhood, concept of socialization, role of family in socialization process of children, parenting style and parent-child relationship. Lastly, we shall discuss various child rearing practices. We shall touch upon some other aspects related to childhood in the second unit.

1.3 CONSTRUCTS OF CHILDHOOD

1.3.1 What is childhood?

Let us start with the concept of childhood. When a person crosses a particular age, say for example 16, s/he thinks that s/he has crossed childhood and has enough experiences about childhood. From this point of view each individual has her/his own theory and constructions of childhood.

From academic and professional point of view people have different views about childhood. For example, child Psychologists may have different views than Anthropologists or Sociologists.

Before you start reading this unit, you may write on a piece of paper about your own views about childhood. How do you perceive a child and her/his childhood? Do you think it is important to study the commonalities and diversities within the motion of childhood? I think, you will agree as you would see that different societies treat childhood differently, and even different families in a particular society treat children differently.

Childhood is the age span ranging from birth to adolescence (Macmillan Dictionary for students, Macmillan Pan Ltd. 1981).

According to development psychologists, childhood is divided into the stages of infancy and toddlerhood (first 2 years), early childhood (2 – 6 years), middle childhood (6 – 12 years) and adolescence (developmental transition between childhood and adulthood).

It is stated by the eminent authors in this field that childhood as an idea has changed over time (Cunningham, 1998). The concepts of childhood appear to evolve and change shape as

lifestyle changes with the passage of time.

Childhood is a time of learning playing, socializing and exploring things without much interference from the adults.

James and James (2004) developed the notion of the cultural politics of childhood – the combination of national and therefore, cultural contexts, social practices and political process through which childhood is uniquely constructed in different societies at different times.

1.3.2 Commonalities and Diversities of Childhood

Commonalities of childhood mean those things that are common to children everywhere by virtue of their structural position.

Diversities of childhood mean in terms of their lived experiences, children's childhoods differ enormously within any given society.

How a person experienced a childhood differs from society to society, culture to culture, place to place. A childhood experienced by an individual in developed countries differs significantly from the one experienced in developing or an under developed country. Moreover, there are poor families in developed counties and rich families in developing counties. So, the variations in childhood experiences always persist whether it is developed or developing countries. Research on children's perspectives of economic adversity states that children are not very much concerned about their lack of resources, per se, but exclusion from activities that other children take for granted together with embarrassment and shame about not being able to participant on equal terms with other children (Words worth, McPeak & Feeny, 2005; Redmond, 2008; cited in Marrow, 2011).

Marrow (2011) opined that we need to respect the dignity and self-worth of all children. We always should try to understand the lives of the children from their own view points. Childhood is not the same for all children. It is always better and meaningful to

speak of a diversity of children's experiences rather than a single universal phenomenon of children.

1.3.3 Changing Views about Childhood

According to famous French social historian Phillipe Areis (1979) childhood is socially constructed. Childhood has different meanings. Children from different historical periods and cultures have played different roles and have undertaken different activities. You must have noted from history how children in early days worked with their parents and helped in cultivation, building huts and houses, selling goods in the market, making and or repairing handicrafts, preparing tea in the tea stalls, washing utensils and so on. This is still visible in many countries including our country. Children have worked as wage labourers as they were not sent to schools.

Marrow (2011) noted that industrialized western societies demand school work as they perceive children as future members of the labour force. However, this is a common view now all over the world. Children are over burdened with their school work. The adults concentrate on the future of the children not the present. As a result the children have little time to enjoy and experience childhood.

You may have observed in many families the girl child works continuously in home, take care of younger brother and sisters and even parents especially working parents. They have little or no time to think about their childhood and concentrate on their studies.

There are examples how construction of childhood changes in different societies, families and places and above all over time.

1.4 CHILDHOOD AND SOCIALIZATION

Childhood studies provide an interdisciplinary approach to the study of children and childhood (Marrow, 2007). Children studies challenge to consider many question like, how can we understand the complexities of

children's everyday lives while respecting their different circumstances?

How can we draw on the diverse disciplinary perspectives and latest thinking about children and childhood to best progress their interest and well being? (Marrow, 2007).

Marrow (2007) states that social policies in many countries perceive children as future beings. There is a need to shift focus from 'the child' towards children. This emphasizes the idea of *children as a social group*. It is also important to remember that there are differing childhoods e.g. structured (like adulthood) by social class, gender, ethnicity, disability, and urban/rural location.

1.4.1 Concept of Socialization

Socialization is the set of events and processes by which we acquire the beliefs and behaviours of the particular society and subgroup into which we are born (Maccoby, 1980). Socialization depends upon cognitive and language skills of the children and also biological factors and physical environment.

According to Lerner and Shea (1982) individuals needed the group for their survival and the group needed individuals. Children born into a society were always instructed in the rules and tasks of that society i.e. they were socialized in order to ensure their eventual contribution to maintenance of the society. Socialization depends on the contexts and settings in which it occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Any individual is associated and influenced by many units viz., a family, a local culture, an ethnic culture, national culture, and so on. Each of these units play a significant role in the socialization process.

Socialization is the process by which individuals learn the culture of their society (Haralambos and Holborn, 2002). They reiterated that it is through socialization that an individual bears resemblances to another human being, and as such he/she is defined as normal based on the standards of his/her society. It is society that defines norms, values, morals, culture and mode of

interpretation of events to which an individual normally subscribes in order to be socially accepted by his/her peers.

Agents of socialization:

There are various agents of socialization which are classified in two main groups namely *primary* and *secondary*. The family and peer groups are considered to be primary, whereas, the school, religious institutions (e.g. the churches) and mass media are seen as secondary because of their positioning in the socialization process of the children. Primary agents of socialization are probably the most important in the socialization process of an individual.

**ACTIVITY 1.1**

Ask your parents, uncle, and other members of your family and relatives about their experiences in childhood.

Compare your experiences in childhood with their experiences

1.4.2 Role of Family in Socialization

The family plays several roles in a society. One of the important roles is the care and socialization of new generation.

If you study the form of family in various societies, you will find the form of family various from one society to another. You will also find that the form of family changes due to passage of time.

In Indian society, you will find joint family and nuclear family as well. Few decades before, the number of joint family was more in comparison to present decade. Whatever the form of a family, it has some influence on the developing child. Parents are considered the primary agents of socialization because their influence begins early in life of a child.

The influence depends upon the family configuration. Family configuration is a term that refers to the number of adults and children in a nuclear family (Liebert et.al., 1986). You may notice different configurations e.g., both parents are present in a family,

only mother or father present in a family, single child, boy has brothers but no sister, girl has one or more brothers, and so on. Spacing of siblings in a family also has an effect in socialization.

In some families, there are siblings whose age difference is more than 15 years, that means, brother may be more than 15 years older than the sister or younger brother.

First born child:

Whether there is any significant difference in the socialization process of the first born and later born children? This question inspired many psychologists to study the importance of the first born and later born children in the family and parents perception towards them.

Parents place more importance on their first child, hold high expectations for them and give them lots of attention and affection (Jacobs and Moss, 1976). First born is given more responsibility and power in the family.

What is your opinion? Have you seen any example of this kind in your family or locality?

Younger siblings:

Researchers have noticed that boys of preschool age exhibit more feminine behaviour when they have older sisters in home and more masculine behaviour when they have older brothers (Sutton- Smith & Rosenberg, 1970).

Researchers also found that older siblings in between 8 and 14 months age showed more friendly behaviour to their new brothers and sisters if both children were of same sex than if they were of the opposite sex (Dunn & Kendrick, 1981).

One child:

You many have heard about 'one child problem' in a family. You will listen many to express opinion that one child becomes selfish, egocentric, dependent and so on. It may be true in some cases, but not all. Though there is no influence of older siblings in the family, parental influence is there. In many cases, the only child

becomes independent and does better than other children.

Mothers:

Mother in any society is the prime caretaker of the children. Mother provides nourishment during the first one to two years of life through her milk, warmth and protection. Mother plays various games with the children through which she provides inputs for cognitive, emotional and social development.

In recent times a large percentage of mothers are working outside the home. In some societies around one-third of mothers of infants and young children work in schools, offices and other places. Some have their own business or work in the fields.

Researchers noticed that the daughters of working mothers follow their mothers as model and become outgoing, independent, and motivated to work. However, some children suffer from psychological stress and depression due to mother's absence in home especially during early years of their lives.

Fathers :

Fathers generally do not share the daily responsibilities child rearing. However, in many societies a good number of fathers play an active role in child rearing, and socialization of their children.

**ACTIVITY 1.2**

Interact with the parents of the following family configuration, and collect information about the childrens behaviour patterns, attitude, interest, and so on.

- (i) Both parents are present and more than 2 siblings are there in the family.
- (ii) Either father or mother is present and 2 siblings are there in the family.
- (iii) Single child family, both parents are present.

Note: You may use Questionnaire, interview schedule for this purpose.

1.4.3 Parenting Style

Different parenting styles are related to social, emotional and personality development of children. Most important aspect is the type and degree of control parents exercise over children's behaviour.

Some psychologists have studied parental-control in the children for several years. You have come to know about *authoritarian parenting style*. The Parents who come under this category are strict in the traditional and old-fashioned sense. They lay down the rules for their children and expect that these would be followed in true letter and spirit, and without any argument. They want that their children will be hard working, respect others and become obedient to elders they expect the children shall perform some household chores on regular basis, as a matter of duty, e.g. cleaning house and furnitures, washing clothes, gardening etc.

Authoritative parents are reasonably firm, but favour giving explanations for rules they lay down for their children, and encourage interaction and discussion. Their children are responsible and friendly.

Permissive parents on the other hand, place few restrictions on the children. Permissive parents often are not very involved with the children, their needs and expectations. As a result the children display little or self control.

Authoritative parenting style gives adolescents opportunities to strengthen their independent decision making skills but retain the benefit of their parents' guidance and advice. It creates an atmosphere in which teenagers confide in their parents, and parents therefore, do not have to spy to monitor where their children are and who they are with (Kerr & Stattin, 2003; cited in Sigelman & Rider, 2003).

1.4.4 Parent-child relationship

Many people argued that adolescents loose respect for their parents and feel less close to them than they did as children. Researchers reported that the parent-child relationship does change during adolescence. Time spent together decreases, and this can make adolescents feel less emotionally close to their parents (Collins & Laursen, 2006).

Conflicts bring about changes in the parent-child relationship. As children reach puberty and become more physically and cognitively mature, they assert themselves more. Parents turn over more power to them. Parent-child relationship changes from one in which parents are dominant to one in which parents and sons/daughters are on a more equal footing (Steinberg, 2002; cited in Sigelman & Rider, 2003). The causes of conflicts are disobedience, non-completion of home work, household chores, and so on.

It is has been observed that across cultures, adolescents are more likely to become autonomous, achievement oriented, and well adjusted if their parents consistently enforce a reasonable set of rules, involve their teenagers in decision making, recognize their need for greater autonomy, monitor their comings and goings, gradually loosen the reins, and continue to be warm, supportive, and involved throughout adolescence (Collins & Laursen, 2006; cited in Sigelman & Rider, 2003).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following question in about 80 words.

Q 1: Which parenting style do you think better for the development of the children and why?

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Note : Please try to answer this in your own words. No answer has been provided at the end.

1.5 CHILD REARING PRACTICES

Child rearing practices or methods of disciplining children varied through the years.

In ancient times parents used to give severe punishment to the children to teach them discipline which is visible in few places now-a-days. Parents used to say stories of monsters, demons and ghosts to make them disciplined. Now-a-days, parents generally do not use that tactics, instead they make them deprived of some interesting food or watching T.V., play, and so on.

Parental attitude towards children vary across cultures as well as family size and structure. In many cultures the family was large which was composed of grand parents, parents and children. Large family with members of three generations is less in number now-a-days. In this type of family all share similar type of work, especially, in a store, agriculture land, farm and even in home. In a large family, sometimes parents have to work outside home. The responsibility of child rearing depends upon the elder daughter or brother. The younger children learn about social norms, roles, values, etc. from elder child.

Generally, the younger children develop strong bond with the elder child due to less contact with parents.

You have observed that in case the family has only one or two children of almost similar age, they are often cared for by the outside family member on payment basis. When the children are cared for outside family members they may not find enough warmth as parents may give.

The attitudes, values and expectations of children in these two groups will often be quite different (Craig, 1983).

You may have observed or have heard about some peculiar questions parents asked with regard to child rearing. For example, some modern mother asked whether she would breast-feed the baby or bottle-feed after one year or so, whether she should pick up baby on her arm

immediately the baby start crying, whether she should start toilet training at the age of 5 or after that, and so on.

Though child rearing practices vary from one culture to another, there are some similarities in most of the common questions come to the mind of the parents. The patterns of child rearing have an enormous influence on child's personality development.

Take a look at child rearing practices at your own society. You may see the child rearing practices may differ from other societies.

Do you think parents in your society perceive the infant as dependent or independent. You may observe that whether parents keep their infant in their own room, share a bed while sleeping, or put them in a crib in the room.

You may also observe whether parents pick up the baby immediately while the baby cries, or wait for few minutes and then pick him/her.

Around the end of the second year infants experience increased emotional conflict between their greater needs for autonomy and their obvious dependence and limited skills. You may have observed any infant around 18 months old expresses desire to stay close to his/her mother by pulling the hand of the mother at the same time want to reach to an object. Whenever, the infant sees any stranger wants to reach to his/her mother. Sometimes shows a different way of dealing with the feelings, either crying or suppressing the need to cry (Craig, 1983).

Sometimes parents are harsh in toilet training. They demand that the child must have early and total control of bowl and bladder. They can not tolerate any unmindful release of bladder and bowl.

These types of parents generally become very rude when the child breaks something like cup or plate, or play in a dirty place etc.

In some culture infants receive much more physical contact and affection from mother than other cultures. This behaviour is directly related to concern about physical dangers.

In some culture father spends more time with their children than the other cultures. Parents give more attention to develop obedience and self-discipline. The preschool children learn to take care of themselves.

Generally, at 18 months of age they become capable of controlling their bladder and bowl and also learn to dress themselves. Parents feel that it is their responsibility to praise the children for showing obedience and to punish for disobedience. Punishment does not mean physical punishment, it can be withdrawing any interesting activity, not allowing to continue any play, or ignoring the child for some time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Answer the following question in about 80 words.

- i) In what way the child rearing practices vary over the years?

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Note : You may consult the previous section for answering this question. No answer has been provided at the end.



1.6 LET US SUM UP

- Childhood is the age span ranging from birth to adolescence. How a person experienced a childhood differ from society to society, culture to culture, place to place. We always should try to understand the lives of the children from their own view points. Childhood is not the same for all children. It is always better and meaningful to speak of a diversity of children's experiences rather than a single universal phenomenon of children.
- Social policies in many countries perceive children as future beings. There is a need to shift focus from 'the child' towards children. This emphasizes the idea of *children as a social group*. It is also important to remember that there are differing childhoods e.g. structured (like adulthood) by social class, gender, ethnicity, disability, and urban/rural

location.

- The family plays several roles in a society. One of the important roles is the care and socialization of new generation.
- There are various agents of socialization which are classified in two main groups namely *primary* and *secondary*. The family and peer groups are considered to be primary, whereas, the school, religious institutions (e.g. the churches) and mass media are seen as secondary because of their positioning in the socialization process of the children.
- The influence of family depends upon the family configuration i.e. the number of adults and children in a nuclear family. You may notice different configurations e.g., both parents are present in a family, only mother or father present in a family, single child, boy has brothers but no sister, girl has one or more brothers, and so on. Spacing of siblings in a family also has an effect in socialization.
- Different parenting styles are related to social, emotional and personality development of children. Most important aspect is the type and degree of control parents exercise over children's behaviour.
- Parental attitude towards children vary across cultures as well as family size and structure.



1.7 FURTHER READING

- Aries, P. (1979). *Centuries of Childhood: A social history of family life*. London: Penguin..
- Collins, W.A. & Laursen, B. (2006). *Parent-adolescent relationships*. In P. Noller & J.A.Feeney (Eds.) *Close relationships: functions, forms, and processes*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Feldman, (2010). *Discovering the Life Span*. Noida: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd.
- Haralambus, M & Holborn, M (2002), *Sociology: Themes and Perspective*. London: University Tutorial Press
- Sigelman, C.K. and Rider, E.A (2003). *Human Development*. Delhi: Wadsworth.



1.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions

- Q 1:** How do you define socialization?
- Q 2:** Why mother is called the prime caretaker of the children?
- Q 3:** When the first friendship with peers occurs?
- Q 4:** At what stage the friendship helps to develop intimacy and self-disclosure?
- Q 5:** How the child defines friend at elementary school?

B) Short Questions (Answer in about 150 words)

- Q 1:** Why family is accepted as most important agent of socialization?
- Q 2:** What are the differences between authoritarian parenting style and authoritative parenting style?
- Q 3:** Do you think child rearing practices vary from culture to culture? Give examples.
- Q 4:** What type of environment a child may face in a day care or crèche?
- Q 5:** How the preschool children express friendship?
- Q 6:** Why relationship with a teacher is important for socialization?

C) Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

- Q 1:** Discuss the role family in socialization.
- Q 2:** How conflicts take place in a family? How does it affect parent-child relationship?
- Q 3:** What kind of problem may arise in a child if s/he is separated from parents?
- Q 4:** What kind of developmental shifts are visible between childhood and adolescence stage?

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