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Temperament of underprivileged children

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Abstract

Temperament significantly influences the manner in which a child interact with the environment over the long term and hence his or her psychological adjustment. This paper investigates temperament of underprivileged children of rural Haryana. To achieve the main objectives of the study, 400 children belonged to lower income group were selected randomly from eight villages of Hisar and Ambala districts. Malhotra Temperament Schedule (MTS) developed by Malhotra and Malhotra (1988) was used to assess mother's perception of their children's temperament. The results showed that temperamental dimensions like sociability, emotionality, attentivity, rhythmicity of underprivileged children were similar to standard mean score, while energy level was lower than standard mean score. Almost underprivileged children had easy temperament.

Keywords: Temperament, sociability, emotionality, Attentivity, rhythmicity

1. Introduction

Temperament refers to relatively consistent, basic dispositions inherent in a person that underlie and modulate the expression of activity, reactivity, emotionality and sociability (Goldsmith *et al.*, 1987) [4]. Thomas and Chess (1977) [10] identified nine main dimensions of temperament which encompass those described by Goldsmith *et al.* (1987) [4]. These are the activity level of the child; the regularity of bodily functioning including sleep, hunger and bowel movements; adaptability to changes in routine; response to new situations; level of sensory threshold to produce a response to external stimulation; the general degree of distractibility and the degree of persistence and attention span. On the basis of a profile on these dimensions, a child can be described by certain temperamental styles as easy, difficult or slow-to-warm-up.

Temperament is a core element of human's personality. Child's temperament might be involved in the child's social relationship and affect his or her social development. Since it is unchangeable, understanding temperament is essential to knowing how to approach the child. In the light of these information present study investigated temperament of underprivileged children.

2. Research Methodology

The present study was conducted purposively in Haryana state. Ambala and Hisar districts were selected randomly from Nardak and Bagar zone, respectively for collecting data, and eight villages were selected randomly from two zones (four villages from each district), *i.e.*, Shahpur, Ludas, Harikot and Kamri of Hisar district and Sultanpur, Karsan, Pathredi and Akbarpur of Ambala district for the present research. Four hundred children (25 male and 25 female from each village) in the age group of 6-8 years were selected randomly from rural area. Malhotra Temperament Schedule (MTS) developed by Malhotra and Malhotra in 1988 [5] was used to assess mother's perception of their children's temperament. This schedule has been divided into five temperamental dimensions *i.e.*, sociability, emotionality, energy, distractibility and rhythmicity, respectively. Frequency, mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient were used for statistical analysis of data.

3. Results

3.1 Temperamental dimensions of children

As presented in fig. 1, the standard mean scores given by Molholtra and Molholtra in Molholtra's temperamental scale (1988) [5] were 11.60 for sociability, 6.16 for emotionality, 6.54 for energy, 3.15 for distractibility and 3.54 for rhythmicity, respectively.

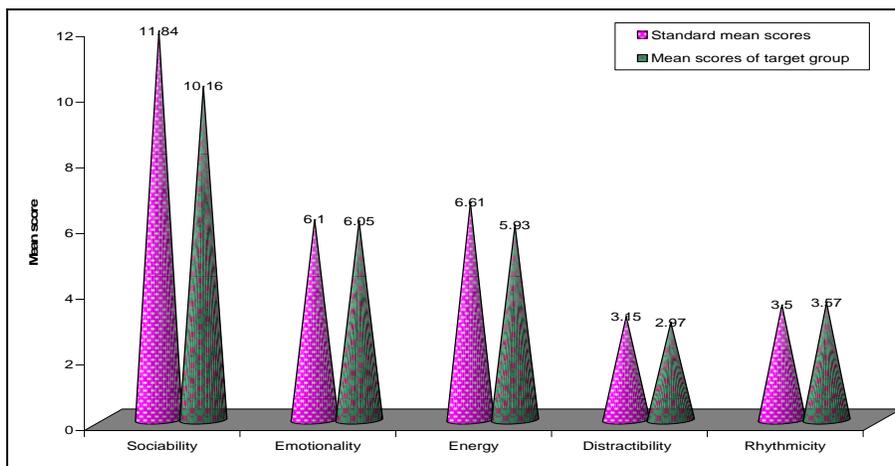


Fig 1: Mean scores of underprivileged children's temperament against standard mean scores

Mean scores of underprivileged children as per temperamental dimensions were for sociability (M=10.16), emotionality (M=6.05), energy (M=5.93), distractibility (M=2.97) and rhythmicity (M=3.57), which indicated that underprivileged children had less sociability and energy than standard mean scores, while similar in emotionality, distractibility and rhythmicity. It can be interpreted from these findings that deprived conditions influenced sociability and energy levels of poor children.

3.2 Levels of children's temperamental dimensions

Temperamental dimensions of children were divided into three categories, i.e., low, moderate and high categories on the basis of obtained scores. Table 2 projects levels of temperamental dimensions of the children as per area. More than half of the children from Hisar and Ambala districts had moderate level

of sociability (77 and 60.50%, respectively) followed by high (7 and 26%, respectively) and low levels (16 and 16.60%, respectively). In emotionality, 60 per cent of the children from Hisar and 63 per cent of the children from Ambala district had high level of emotionality, rest 31.75 per cent of the children had moderate and only 6 per cent of the children had low level of emotionality. Majority of the children from both districts had moderate level of energy (68 and 78%, respectively) and distractibility (65 and 65.50%, respectively) followed by low (21.50 and 8.50%, respectively) and high (10.50 and 13.50%, respectively).

Regarding rhythmicity, near about sixty per cent children of Hisar and Ambala district had high level (62 and 63%, respectively) of rhythmicity, rest 29 per cent of the children had average and 8.50 per cent of the children had low level of rhythmicity.

Table 2: Levels of temperamental dimensions

Temperament al dimensions	Hisar (n= 200)			Ambala (n= 200)			Total (n= 400)		
	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low
Sociability	14 (7.0)	154 (77.0)	32 (16.0)	52 (26.0)	121 (60.5)	27 (13.5)	66 (16.5)	275 (68.75)	59 (14.75)
Emotionality	120 (60.0)	69 (34.5)	8 (4.0)	126 (63.0)	58 (29.0)	16(8.0)	246 (61.5)	127 (31.75)	24 (6.0)
Energy	21 (10.5)	136 (68.0)	43 (21.5)	27 (13.5)	156 (78.0)	17 (8.5)	48 (12.0)	292 (73.0)	60 (15.0)
Distractibility	29 (14.5)	130 (65.0)	41 (20.5)	44 (22.0)	131 (65.5)	25 (12.5)	73 (18.25)	261 (65.25)	66 (16.5)
Rhythmicity	124 (62.0)	60 (30)	16 (8.0)	126 (63.0)	56 (28.0)	18 (9.0)	250 (62.5)	116 (29.0)	34 (8.5)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage.

Hence, it is concluded that because of stressed life and deprived conditions, maximum economically disadvantage children from Hisar as well as Ambala districts had easy temperament.

3.3 Comparison of children's temperamental dimensions against area

Area wise comparison of temperamental dimensions of the

children is displayed in Table 3. Z-values indicated significant differences in sociability (z=4.66), energy (z=2.73) and distractibility (z=2.34) aspects of temperamental dimensions, while non-significant differences were observed in emotionality and rhythmicity between children of Hisar and Ambala districts.

Table 3: Comparison of temperamental dimensions against area n= 400

Temperamental dimensions	Hisar Mean ±SD	Ambala Mean ±SD	Z-test
Sociability	9.80±1.35	10.52±1.69	4.66*
Emotionality	6.05±0.94	6.05±0.95	0.08
Energy	5.78±1.17	6.08±1.01	2.73*
Distractibility	2.88±0.80	3.06±0.72	2.34*
Rhythmicity	3.59±0.68	3.57±0.65	0.31

* Means differ significantly within the row at 5% level of significance.

Children of Ambala district had better sociability ($M=10.52$), energy ($M=6.08$) and distractibility ($M=3.06$) as compared to children of Hisar district ($M=9.80, 6.05, 5.78, M=2.88, 3.59$, respectively). However, children of Hisar and Ambala districts were similar in emotionality ($M=6.05$ each) and rhythmicity ($M=3.59$ and 3.57 , respectively). It is evident that children of Ambala district received more exposure and opportunity to interact with others than children of Hisar district, which made them spontaneous, adjustable, energetic as well as distractible.

3.4 Comparison of children's temperamental dimensions against age

The data furnished in Table 4 compare temperamental dimensions of the children on the basis of their age. Significant difference was pinpointed only in energy level ($z=2.13$) of younger and older children, which highlighted that older children ($M=6.07$) were more energetic as compared to younger children ($M=5.83$). There were non-significant differences between older and younger children in sociability, emotionality, distractibility and rhythmicity aspects of temperamental dimensions.

Table 4: Comparison of temperamental dimensions against age $n=400$

Temperamental dimensions	6-7 years Mean \pm SD	7-8 years Mean \pm SD	Z-test
Sociability	10.13 \pm 1.49	10.20 \pm 1.69	0.44
Emotionality	6.05 \pm 0.90	6.05 \pm 1.01	0.03
Energy	5.83 \pm 1.09	6.07 \pm 1.10	2.13*
Distractibility	2.98 \pm 0.79	2.95 \pm 0.74	0.47
Rhythmicity	3.55 \pm 0.60	3.62 \pm 0.75	0.94

* Means differ significantly within the row at 5% level of significance.

Results revealed that nearly similar mean scores obtained by younger and older children in sociability ($M=10.13$ and 10.20 , respectively), emotionality ($M=6.05$ for each), distractibility ($M=2.98$ and 2.95 , respectively) and rhythmicity ($M=3.55$ and 3.62 , respectively) dimensions of temperament.

The obtained findings evidence that temperament is biological characteristic of children, which remained unchanged throughout life, but it was found that as the children grow older, they understood their environment, well-adjusted in school and more involved in different activities which happen around them, all this lead their active participation and made them more energetic than younger children.

3.5 Comparison of children's temperamental dimensions against gender

Gender wise comparison of children's temperamental dimensions is presented in Table 5. Significant differences were noticed between boys and girls in sociability ($z=2.17$), energy ($z=2.84$) and distractibility ($z=2.69$) aspects of temperamental dimensions at 0.05 level of significance. Boys obtained higher mean score than girls in sociability ($M=10.33$ and 9.99 , respectively), energy ($M=6.08$ and 5.77 , respectively) and distractibility ($M=3.07$ and 2.87 , respectively), which indicated that boys were more spontaneous, initial, reactive and high threshold as compared to girls.

Table 5: Comparison of temperamental dimensions against gender $n=400$

Temperamental dimensions	Boys Mean \pm SD	Girls Mean \pm SD	Z-test
Sociability	10.33 \pm 1.59	9.99 \pm 1.53	2.17*
Emotionality	5.99 \pm 0.98	6.11 \pm 0.90	1.23
Energy	6.08 \pm 1.06	5.77 \pm 1.12	2.84*
Distractibility	3.07 \pm 0.72	2.87 \pm 0.80	2.69*
Rhythmicity	3.52 \pm 0.62	3.64 \pm 0.71	1.83

* Means differ significantly within the row at 5% level of significance.

Girls achieved slightly higher mean scores in emotionality ($M=6.11$) and rhythmicity ($M=3.64$) than boys ($M=5.99$ and 3.52 , respectively). It is evident that girls were sensitive and did not express their feelings easily, they tried to make themselves contented and happy. They were more disciplined and fussy about time than boys.

4. Discussion

Rothbart (1989) [7] considers temperament as *constitutional differences in reactivity and self-regulation, with 'constitutional' seen as the relatively enduring biological makeup of the organism influenced over time by heredity, maturation and experience*. Results of present study revealed that mean scores of selected underprivileged children were below in sociability and energy levels as compared to standard mean scores given by Malhotra and Malhotra (1988) [5]. Disadvantaged children were found to be less approaching, less adaptable and more negative in mood (Wachs, 1988) [11]. Further, based on achieved mean scores, majority of the children had moderate category of sociability, energy and distractibility, while high level of emotionality and rhythmicity. These are indicators of easy temperamental style. Children with easy temperament are easy going, happy, positive in mood, adaptable to new situations, and are regular in their habits. Malhotra and Malhotra (1988) [5] also reported similar findings. These findings also coincided with Balda *et al.* (2009) [1] and Shahi (2011) [9] who found that majority of boys and girls fell in the easy temperamental style. Children of Ambala district were found to have more sociability, energy and distractibility than children of Hisar district. Parents of Ambala district migrated from different places, worked in factories and lived in labour colonies. Thus, their children had to adjust and adopt different surrounding and they had more opportunity to interact with others which made them more spontaneous, energetic as well as distractible.

The present study indicated that older children had more energy as compared to younger children. This difference might be due to maturation and familiar with surrounding which made them more active and energetic. Significant sex differences were also observed for sociability, energy and distractibility dimensions of temperament. Boys were more social, energetic and distractible than girls. Thus, it may be concluded that mothers perceive boys' and girls' temperament in a different manner. These findings get support from Malhotra and Malhotra (1988) [5]. Energy dimension of temperament included physical and psychological energy, *i.e.*, activity and intensity level. Buss (1989) [2] also indicated that boys were more active than girls and girls were more fearful than boys. In another study, Prior *et al.* (2000) [6] demonstrated that boys were more aggressive and hyperactive than girls. Walker *et al.* (2001) [12] also investigated the relation between sex and temperament of preschool aged children. Boys were rated as more active, more distractible and less persistent than girls. Balda *et al.* (2009) [1] conducted a study with preschool

children and found that boys were more active and less withdrawn as compared to girls.

5. Conclusion

At the end of the research, it can be concluded that majority of the underprivileged children had less sociability and energy levels against standard mean scores given by Malhotra and Malhotra (1988) [5]. Majority of the children had easy temperament. Children of Ambala district had better sociability, energy and distractibility than children of Hisar district. Older children had more energy as compared to younger children. Significant sex differences were found for sociability, energy and distractibility dimensions of temperament. Boys had better sociability, energy and distractibility than girls.

6. Recommendations for parents and caregivers

- Parents should accept the child's basic temperament and respect his or her uniqueness without comparing him or her to others.
- Labeling on the basis of temperament should be avoided. Caregivers should be aware of the child's many attributes; do not categorize the child at an early age, because labels may not accurately reflect him or her. Labels will limit the child future growth and development.
- Parents should help the child know his or her own temperament. Self-awareness is the first step toward modifying behavior, talk about temperament to the child and help him or her understand how the temperament affects his or her feelings and behavior, and the impact on others as well as.
- Parents should understand *goodness of fit* between the child's temperament and his or her environment. Parents and children with different temperaments can have healthy relationships by working towards *goodness of fit*. It is difficult to rear children with difficult temperament. Parents may use hostile and coercive style to handle these children. Parent-child relations can be improved by the parents by learning to give the child adequate stimulation at crucial time and by being tolerant. Children need to learn to tolerate stress in hard situations.
- Parents and significant caregivers need to set aside special times to talk about the child's frustrations and hurts because he or she seldom has that, and once it happens, the child has very weak tolerance on that.
- For difficult and active child, parents, teachers and caregivers should provide areas for vigorous play to use his or her energy. Prepare the child for activity changes and use redirection to help him or her to transit from one place to another.
- For slow-to-warm up or cautious child, parents should stick to a routine and give him or her ample time to get used to new situations.
- Distractible children hear one thing at a time. Hence, the parents should give children simple, step by step directions. Parents should keep home calm and predictable and make sure that child gets hands-on active play daily; it helps them use energy constructively.
- Parents and other caregivers should be a good role model and encourage positive social skills, such as trading, negotiating, sharing, inviting others to play, asking before entering other play, offering help others, asking for help and sharing play ideas.
- Parents may also provide guidance on the spot to facilitate communication patterns which contribute to the maintenance of cohesive play.

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