

# **FAMILY: A SOURCE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS**

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## **Abstract:**

Prophet Muhammad (PBH) once had said that parents have an ultimate impact on child development. This is consistent with the facts that child development is influenced very much by the traits of the parents as well as the environment. This shows that the parents have a considerable influence on the child development. As young age is considered as a crucial period, parents play a significant role in rearing their children. In the family, it is the place where all aspects of life are learned and cultivated. This paper is trying to highlight the importance of family, namely the parents, in cultivating positive attitudes and positive behaviours in the child. It is believed that the child positive attitude and behaviour is closely related to their parents. Previous researches had shown that a child normally develop his/her individual potential through interaction with their parents and family members. The intended characteristics are normally inherited through intentional and unintentional attitudes and behaviours of the parents and family. Therefore, to develop positive characteristics in child the family should provide a good example and conducive environment so that the inheriting processes can take place. At the same time, parents however have in-built experiences of bringing up children which was traditionally inherited from their parents. This has made the task becomes more challenging. How this issue is being compromised by the parent and the observational learning which underlying the processes is discussed. Few suggestions are also recommended.

## 1.0 Introduction

According to Webster's New World College Dictionary (1997), family is defined as "all of the people living in the house. It does not necessarily consist of two parents and their biological children, with the father going to work and the mother staying at home to raise the children. In fact, it is more unusual for this type of family situation to exist in today's society (McCarthy, 1992). They may be raised by single parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and so on. Children of divorced parents may also have different living arrangements. In terms of personal development the children will bring with them not just the cultural and structural differences but also the problems of the family.

Therefore, the importance of family in influencing the developmental process cannot be ignored. Social theorists have viewed the internalisation processes as stemming primarily from parent's influence through their parenting practices, disciplinary strategies and parenting styles (Piaget, 1965; Kohlberg, 1969). This article discusses the parent's role in facilitating the child personal development at home. In the next section, the aspects on human development are elaborated. It followed by the discussion of the nature of the parent's interaction that facilitate the personal development of the child. The article ends with concluding remarks which include the suggestions and recommendations.

## 2.0 Human Development

The term development in its general psychological sense refers to certain changes that occur in human between conception and death. The term however is not applied to all changes, but rather to those that appear in orderly ways and remain for a reasonably long period of time. Bernstein, *et al.* (1994) defined development as age-related changes that are systematic and sequential for the entire life. This means that the development does not include changes that are brief or reversible such as those resulting from illness, accidents, or drugs.

In general, the development can be seen in four basic dimensions such as physical, cognitive, emotional and social. Although each dimension refers to a particular aspect of development, there is considerable interdependency among the dimensions.

Physical development refers to a process which includes genetic foundations for development such as the components of the body, changes in motor development, senses, and bodily systems. It is also involved related

aspects such health care, nutrition, sleep, drug abuse and sexual functioning. Cognitive development includes all changes in the intellectual processes of thinking, learning, remembering, judging, problem solving and communicating. It will included both heredity and environment influences. Emotional development refers to the development of attachment, trust, security, love and affection, and a variety of emotions, feelings and temperaments. It is also includes development of concepts of self and autonomy, stress, emotional disturbances and acting-out behaviour. The last dimension is social development. In this dimension the emphasis is on the socialisation process, moral development, and relationships with peers and family members. It is also emphasise marriage, parenthood, work, and vocational roles and employment.

In discussing these four dimensions of development it should consider two basic foundations of influence to the development: heredity and nurture. These two aspects are no doubt significance to the human development. Many studies found that these two aspects play an important role in the developmental processes (see Woolfolk, 2007; Rice, 1997, Feldman, 1996).

In a study on personal development, Chipuer, *et al.* (1993) has found that heredity not only has an important influence in intelligence, but also exerts a strong influence on personality. The same findings also found in Goleman's study about identical twins. It revealed that heredity has a stronger influence than environment on a number of key personality traits.

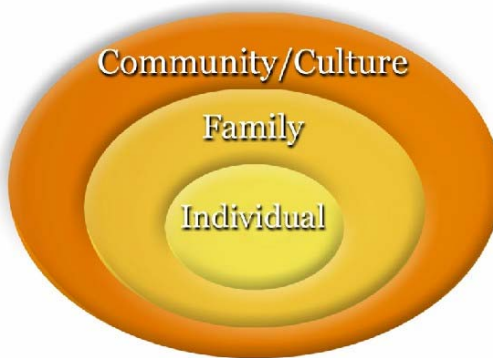
However, it was very much on the impact of heredity in the earlier stage of development as appeared in Goldsmith and Gottesman (1981) study. They found that the relative influence of heredity usually declined as infants got older, whereas environmental influences became more important.

Certainly then, the quality of nurturing experiences exerted strong modifying influences on children's behaviour. As Coll (1990) concluded that both nature and nurture are equally exerts an important influences. Some aspects of development seem to be influenced more by heredity, while others by environment. However, it is not the intention of the paper to explore the significance of both the heredity and environment influences but it is more to highlight why family influence is very important in influencing the personal development of a person.

### **3.0 Foundation of Positive Personal Development**

Apparently children do not develop in vacuum. Various aspects play important roles such as family, peers, neighbourhood, community or even the country in the development process. In other words, they are influenced by parents, sibling, other relatives, friends, and other adults with whom they come in contact as well as any groups which they are a part are fundamental. They are considered partly as a product of social influences.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) in explaining the relationship have developed an ecological model for understanding the social influences. Below is the model that shows how the relationship between the child and the family in terms of its immediate impact:



(Source: Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998. The ecology of developmental processes)

It considers social influences as a series of systems extending beyond the child. The child is at the centre of the system. The most immediate influences are the family and that is including those with which the child has immediate contact. Hence, what happens at home is fundamental. As children grow they learn values, attitudes, mores, customs and religion of their family.

Therefore, family influence is categorised as one of the vital elements in influencing the child development. Thornton, *et al.* (1990) concludes family as a principal transmitter of knowledge, values, attitudes, roles and habits that one generation passes on to the next

#### **4.0 The Impact of Family In Personal Development**

Family is a first place where children learn about life, about themselves and the world. As family, it should provide a positive environment where the children can live and learn positively. Parent for example, is a navigator of the marital ships. However, it is important to notes that in terms of influence, not all families have a positive influence on their children, nor all families able to create a positive and healthy environment in which children can grow. Miller, *et al.* (1993) outlined three influences that have a significant impact on how the parents can play important roles in the child development: the psychological adjustment, parenting style, and the quality of the marriage.

### *Parents' Psychological Adjustment*

As parent, they should have a stable psychological attribute. If the child is exposed to a high level of parental anger, the emotional and behavioural reactivity of the children is heightened. In reverse, if the healthy psychological is exposed a positive effect will be occurred (Hock & Schirtsinger, 1992). A study showed that if mothers have high self-efficacy, or believe in their ability to be competent and effective parents, it is more likely to have less difficulty in caring their children (Teti & Gelfand, 1991). In fact they praise their children more and less intrusively controlling. This is consistent with another study of the father. In influencing the variability of the children's social and emotional competence the father's psychiatric status and the marital status are significant (Goodman, *et al.*, 1993).

In a similar situation Kershner & Cohen (1992) have found that the maternal depression was associated with lower self-esteem, lower sense of personal control, lower cognitive ability and power social-perspective-taking ability of the child. It is clear that when one or both parents have a serious disturbance (depression, unstable personality) the child are at risk for cognitive, social, emotional and school-related difficulties.

### *Parenting Style*

The way the children have been brought up is also important. Obviously, parenting style is indirectly transferred from one generation to another. As a

result it is common to see the tendency of applying the personal experiences into its current context. Later, bringing up children becomes ritual.

Speaking about parenting style, there are at least three types of child rearing identified – authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. However, there are two situations where the style becomes significant: the parents who perceived child rearing as just an inherent matter and the parents who understand that as a personal responsibility that everyone should face when they become a parent.

Authoritarian style potentially developed a sense of obedience. This type of parent tends to use force to curb the children's self-will, restricting autonomy and agreement. The tendency is higher to use a harsh discipline. Simone *et al.* (1992) argued that this could be a consequence of their personal upbringing that they are experiencing. As such, children with fear that exhibit withdrawn, generally irritable and unassertive, hostile and overly aggressive were expectedly developed.

The permissive style is less restraint and freely accepts the children's impulses and actions. No effort is done to shape the children's behaviour. Some parents are more protective while the other freed the children to do what ever they wanted to do. Sometimes they understand this as an understanding parent without realising that it will drag them into responsibility avoidance attitude. Nevertheless, it just forms children with negative personality such as rebellious, self-indulgent, aggressive, impulsive and socially inept.

Travillion and Snyder (1993) found that lack of discipline is associated with social aggression which, in turn, is associated with peer rejection. Therefore, it is the parents' job to set-up the standard in the home which should be firm, clear and easy to understand. By doing so the sense of understanding of which one is right and which one is wrong can be developed in the child.

The authoritative parents usually direct their children's activities in a rational manner. In doing it they always encourage discussion among family member. Although they tend to be firm in controlling the member's behaviour but they are not overly restrictive. Kochanska *et al.* (1989) noted that this type of parents normally recognised the children's individual needs and interests without compromising the standards that have been set-up. Similarly, Donovan *et al.* (1990) also found that the authoritative parents work best in the socialisation of the children.

Children are different in nature. It is important for parents to understand their influence on the children's personal development. Amato (1990) shows that

there are degrees between parenting patterns such as love-autonomy, love-control, hostility-autonomy, and hostility control. Each of these patterns shows how the autonomy versus control and love versus hostility interact one to another. A study in America also shows significant relationships between the family life and the child development (<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/childcare>). Children will do better when parents are more educated, have higher income, and had well-organised routines, books, and took part in learning activities. These shows how important the relationships in the family.

It seems to be that the maximum amount of love and the right balance between autonomy and control determines how successful the parenting will be. As Jakab (1987) noted that parents who genuinely loved their children provides them with the most important requirement for successful socialisation. It is remarkable to point that the family impact on children development is fundamental.

### *Quality of the Marriage*

Harmonious marriage tends to be associated with sensitive parenting and warm parent-child relationships (Floyd & Zmich, 1991). Therefore, when there is problem in the marriage, children will potentially be more anxious and aggressive and have a negative perception about their personal development. In a more extreme the unresolved conflicts is just left the children with fear, great deal of stress, anger and a sense of helplessness.

Mutual understanding is therefore fundamental at the earlier stage of relationships. The adjustment between the persons should be started long way before they agreed to tie the relationships into marriages. By doing this at least they can get to know each other better, their strengths and weaknesses. This is because after the marriage, the challenges will be bigger - financial, having children, extended family, and many more.

As parents they should strive to develop quality marriages so that a positive environment can be created. One thing should be noted here however is, not all marital conflicts are harmful to children. As discussed earlier, if the parents can handle and resolve all disagreements and conflicts, a positive result in the children can be expected. Jouriles *et al* (1991) noted that the marital quality affects the children's adjustments and developments, influences the children's behaviour problems over their life span.

## 5.0 Concluding Remarks

There are so much to be done in ensuring the effectiveness of the family entity of cultivating the positive attitudes and behaviours. When we set up home and have a family, we naturally hope to create a happy environment in which our children can grow up. We believed that by providing happy and positive environment we can have a happy family. Neither we realised nor we don't the environmental influence is vital to the human development. As we have discussed earlier, child development is influenced by both the heredity and environment. Several aspects that as parents they should consider and understand is that to provide a positive environment in the family as described as follows:

### a. The feeling of love and respect

The feeling of love and respect are no doubts have a significance impact on the family. By having it in the relationship, the interaction will be accompanied by trust and honest. This will help to give all member of the family a feeling of assurance as well as a sense of security. As Maslow (1970) said in his hierarchy needs theory, the security dimension is considered as a foundation of a more complex development. As a parent they are require to show empathy and caring to foster a close tie in the family

### b. The importance of children to the family

As an 'amanah' concept in Islam, children are considered as a responsibility. Their world will be full of joy and happiness if the parents can spend their time together with positive and healthy activities. Worrying too much and very strict is not very much helpful in providing a happy environment. In fact that can make a great deal of nagging and unpleasant relationship.

### c. The concept of perfect in human



As parents we should be aware that no body is perfect in this world. There are days when we are cross and irritable, particularly when we are tired, unwell or worried. That is so to the children. They are more fragile and unstable as they are in the process of learning. It is the guidance that they are looking for from the parents to enable them reaching the full potential of their development.

d. The impact of expectation

Children enjoy life more when they are praised and loved for what they can do, rather than criticised for what they are unable to do. We as parents should learn how to understand our children so that we know what are their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the parent should be more tolerance and understanding the children, of what they are doing or what they are interested in. In particular parental expectations for children's bright futures are crucial as the understanding will help the parents setting-up expectation according to the children's ability.

As conclusion, can there possibly be a more difficult job than raising children to become a well-balanced person? As parents we play an important role in creating a healthy environment and instilling values and information that will give the children the best chance of positive, lifelong health. This doesn't simply mean making sure that they eat nutritiously or is encouraged to exercise. It also means helping them to grow positively and healthily so that they can recognise themselves as a person.

As parents, they cannot depend so much on other aspects of influence to help us raise the children. It is a mistake to let them grow and develop on their own without guidance. They should show them a good example that they can observe and internalise before coming to imitating the stage. In fact, without realising it the parents are actually competing with other aspects to influence the children.

It seems that the family matters are probably is great in children's adoption of healthy habit. In other words, the parent should not only reinforce positive environment but also good healthy habits. Research has shown that children closely model their parent's habit, no matter how positive the behaviour is. The discussion ends by considering this one fundamental question that is whether as parent they are capable enough to embark all sought of responsibilities regarding forming a family, parenthood, and other aspects that related to sociological, physical, emotional, and psychological of human being.

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