

Review

Introduction :

The motto of JPIP is ‘Facilitating potentials for positive social change. Keeping this in mind it has undertaken couple of research projects and activities in social psychology. This is an effort to take a bird’s eye view of these efforts from a researcher’s perspective.

Social psychology is a highly vibrant and dynamic area. Scope of social psychology ranges from ‘individual in a group’ to different ‘social issues and problems’ - their impact on the society as a whole. The topics in social psychology deal with theories of socialization, its relation to other social sciences like economics and political science which have direct influence on the human social behavior, education -which gives an individual its first formal social encounter to a group, etc.

Social psychology has its roots in almost all human behaviors. The issues of interpersonal relationships may influence a person’s inner and outer life to a great extent. It has been observed that societal burden often leads to chronic unhealthy behaviors and illnesses. (Dijkstra, A., Rothman, A. 2008). Various factors of physical environment also may influence the person’s socio-psychological behavior (e.g. global warming). Environmental problems can both become serious or reduce due to social interventions (Steg, L., Gifford, R., 2008). Quality of life is also an upcoming complex area in which in depth research is being done.

Gender psychology is an important dimension of social psychology. Gender issues and their impact on human minds have fascinating researchers in psychology since years. It is reflected through studies on gender and work, gender differences in potentials, perceptions, social norms and gender stereotypes etc.

Considering the broad spectrum of social psychology, Jnana Prabodhini’s Institute of Psychology has been conducting different studies pertaining to the above mentioned issues. This chapter presents the abstracts of studies which reveal many such dimensions of social psychology through empirical and qualitative research endeavors.

Family Dynamics

Social issues which influence human psyche need to be studied in an objective manner. The basic social institution in human life is home. Parenting is an influential process which shapes human behavior in childhood to a large extent. JPIP has done an array of research on this

issue. Diana Baumrind's model of parenting style was used to explore the relationship between parenting style and academic achievement of high school children. Normally it is believed that either a very strict parenting or a highly democratic, open style parenting may make children study a lot and obtain grades through fear or pleasure of free choice respectively for these styles. However research at JPIP indicates that a unique combination of both these ends in authoritarian parenting leads to better academic achievements in the kids (15).

Such results also help us in developing intervention programmes for the target group to enable them to become better parents. It is not just the disciplinary methods adapted by the parents but also their emotionality that leave an impression on a child's mind. It is then reciprocated by the children as well. Responses given by the parents to children at different occasions are crucial in deciding how the children may react to the same situation and also how they value themselves in a larger perspective. It has been observed that parent's emotions like anxiety and sadness are reflected through children's behavior as well. It is a well known fact that right from infancy children are very sensitive to the emotional cues given by the parents (17). This gives us a direction to think about how parents can shape their emotional expressions so as to provide a well managed set of emotional responses to their offsprings. What do cross cultural studies in parenting direct us to? An effort made in this direction covers the issue of internalizing and externalizing problem behavior in Dutch and Indian children with reference to the parenting they received. It was seen that problem behavior was associated with authoritarian style of parenting. It was also seen that the more the positive attachment with parents less was the frequency of problem behavior across the two countries (19). Similar study deals with the two same groups in reference to aggression in children. The results indicate a comparatively low quality of parent child interaction in Indian children than the Dutch ones. Aggression is also observed more in Indian children (22). All these studies make us aware of the huge potential requirement in the field of enhancement of parenting skills in our society.

Problems in Children and Youth

We know, an individual is affected by socio-cultural currents around. Salient incidences or social situations may sow the seeds for a particular behavior change. Understanding the psyche behind people involved in such conditions can help us understand the complex role of an individual in a society. A few studies done in this direction can help us in understanding the objective facts behind such behaviors.

India is a country blessed with diversity. This diversity itself may sometimes prove to be a challenge. People with different religious faiths may encounter conflicts instigated by some nasty

elements in the society. These conflicts leave their impressions on the minds of people suffered for a long time. Especially the children are worse affected. An investigation in the impact of communal riots on the psycho-physiological wellbeing of children was conducted by JPIP in 2002-03. The variety of techniques used in the study point out towards the need of how serious we as adults should be in reacting to such conflicts. It was observed that children become immensely insecure and anxious in such situations and the most shaking fact is that they develop a very biased image of the persons belonging to other communities (13).

As children are affected by social conditions, the adolescents as a group are also very sensitive to the conditions around. Self concept is a highly important aspect for an adolescent child. Generally rural students tend to have a lower self concept as compared to urban ones due to scarcity of exposure. However, a study indicates that self concept of rural adolescent girls can be enhanced through educational programs (9). Though education has reached the interiors, it is a question how far it contributes to the employability for the individuals. What are the needs of the rural unemployed dropouts for their livelihood? A study conducted to explore this talk about the ignored concerns of this youth in the interior parts of our country. Their inability to internalize the prevailing educational content they are left with no choice but to face severe frustration and low quality life through out. It was observed that they need concrete bi-passes at proper junctures so that they are skilled enough to earn their bread and be confident in life. This study also covers the attitude of the parents of these drop outs which also underlines the above mentioned need (14).

Gender issues are an important aspect of studies in social psychology. The deep rooted patriarchal system across the world has influenced the women as a group in almost all areas of their lives. Is there any real potential difference as far as capacities are concerned? In a study on 'gender differences in multiple intelligence inclinations', it was found that boys differ than girls significantly on linguistic, visual, spatial, intrapersonal and musical intelligence. And there too, girls are higher in all these intelligences, indicating higher potentials of cognitive nature (27). In spite of this fact and even after the strong waves of the feminist ideologies and movements in the world, many groups of women are still facing severe discrimination in many ways. One such study tries to explore the role of decision making of women within the family. It was observed that even in simple day to day situations a women is reluctant to take the responsibility of her choices and succumbs to the family pressures. If she gets a chance to take any crucial decision by herself she feels confident and empowered (20). Similar findings are reflected from the studies on psychosocial excellence of rural women. The studies talk about how rural women given the opportunity for enhancing themselves can build their personal and social capacities to an extent to show significant

impact on the solution to a social issue like malnutrition and similar day to day issues (21, 24,29). Similar picture is observed in the urban set up. A research on the women from upper socio-economic class who were involved in some social commitment indicates that their mere involvement in such an endeavor has opened doors for actualizing the latent potentials for them. Their increased self worth, leadership capacities and strong positive outlook developed after their active participation in the social commitment clearly shows that women have the power of self emancipation by putting in their best efforts as a group and as an individual also (30).

What can be the very first step towards eliminating these social problems? As psychologists and educationists one constantly ponders over this issue and finds that making people aware of the multiple dimensions of these issues is the basic step to be taken. A doctoral research conducted at JPIP actually deals with this methodology of developing social awareness amongst high school students in a systematic manner through the education itself (8). It points out that not just the intellectually superior but also the intellectually average children can become equally aware of and motivated to work on the social issues that they can understand and feel linked with. This intervention in developing social awareness was again replicated for adolescent girls which supported the earlier findings (11). It also showed that gender issues were naturally addressed more in that group and percentage of emotive responses were significantly higher than cognitive ones. This research also emphasizes that it is not the method in which a teacher uses to develop awareness but the intensity with which she presents it and relates them to the issue. Another way of transcending this awareness is through value education. This term has become a key concept in education but often remains for the sake of it. How can it come into actual application in high school children who aspire for liberty and are easily susceptible to glamour and attractions outside? An effort in this direction on value education through systems study (systemic thinking) and futuristic thinking showed positive changes in value systems regarding family and social behavior (26).

One of the most controversial topics in Indian educational system today is of sexuality education in adolescent age. The need is stressed but there is suspicion among people in educational area about its effects on their personal and social life. A study indicates that attitude of adolescent girls towards menstruation is influenced by the home and educational adjustment as well as their general health awareness is related to it significantly (5). An experimental intervention with the objective of facilitating attitude change regarding sexuality and gender issues was taken up as a challenge. A well articulated training program undertaken by the involvement of expert volunteer trainers gave highly positive results. It was observed that such a

training is useful across rural-urban/ male-female/ or school-college populations. A replication of the same also supported the earlier findings (25). This indicates the need to educate the teachers for implementing the results of such programs.

Quality Of Life (QOL)

Quality of life is another topic in which social psychologists are most interested. Though this is a broad term, most of the times it is observed that QOL depends more on one's own interpretation rather than on the external observed, measurable parameters. Apart from the factors coming under economy, health and/or status in society, the internal psychological processes play an important role in defining and perceiving QOL as satisfactory or vice versa. Thus everyone's implicit definition of satisfaction in life may be different. A research on exploring this satisfaction profile of Indian people throws light on some interesting facts. A general notion is that status at work and economical returns might be the major sources of satisfaction. However, it was observed that not finances but the family was the highest source of satisfaction across the group. Interestingly, as the education, economic strata became higher satisfaction levels dropped down (10). This was indeed a stimulation for further research. Considering relationships as a major source of satisfaction a detailed study on marital satisfaction and its relationship with emotional intelligence was conducted. The findings in this research also challenge some of our common beliefs. It clearly states the important role of emotional intelligence in deriving satisfaction from intimate relationships like marriage. It also states that not mere age or years of married life contribute towards the high levels of either of these variables. It also indicates some important gender differences on these factors (18). Thus it emphasizes on the self motivated efforts towards working on relationships as well as emotional strengths to maintain the quality of life.

Combining gender issues with QOL a study concerning the working women in IT sector throws light on some important facts. It shows that women working in IT are expressing satisfaction about the job and life in general. 'Physical and emotional well-being' is higher as compared to their 'social well-being' (16). This also is an effect of above mentioned process of actualizing one's potentials in a concrete form. Generally topic of QOL is more dealt with adult population. A question comes to our mind regarding how it can be applied to student population. An effort was done at JPIP in this direction as well (23).

Individual in the Society : Personal Factors

'Individual in the society' is the key factor in any social psychological research. Various personality traits have a subtle but decisive influence on the person's response to any social

stimulation, which is interpreted in terms of individual differences. Achievement motivation is such an aspect of personality which has clear social dimension. That presence of a competitor itself is a trigger for motivation. But sometimes motivation can be from within. In what conditions does achievement motivation express itself fully? Can intrinsic motivation be built? Is group motivation different from an individual's achievement motivation? JPIP has tried to answer these fundamental questions through some empirical studies. The first of these studies is 45 years old. This study of achievement motivation in young adolescent boys shows how lay man's notion of 'success through pressure' fails in reality. It shows that children cannot perform well under aroused condition as compared to neutral condition when no external agency is acting as a arousing or suppressing agent for their motivation. It also talks about the impact of socio-economic class on levels of achievement motivation and also that of parental education and occupation (2).

A similar study conducted after nearly 30 and odd years on adolescent girls shows that achievement motivation can be enhanced through consistent efforts. It indicates that directed efforts can make a person think about his/her possibilities of gaining measurable success in a task and actually working towards it (12).

Sports is a field where individual motivation has limitations in drawing success. If the whole group is motivated together it can give considerable upper hand in a game. In a research aimed at developing group motivation in 'kho-kho' teams of school going kids, it was observed that the teams performed better on field as well as in the paper pencil test on motivation (6). Today sports psychology has become a well appreciated branch of psychology. But apart from sports activity such motivation can be enhanced for other group targets as well.

Socio-economic background of an individual has a profound effect on many personality variables. However cognition seems to be an exception to it. A study of assessment of thinking processes and creativity of rural women indicates that the distribution of scores on the five thinking processes was normal, being independent of each other and there was no variation across sex, age, family type, etc. on concept formation, decision making and problem solving (4). Personality influences the performance on some other parameters in various ways. One's concept about self, communication skills acquired, perceived stress are some factors which affect the person's interpersonal relations considerably. Specially in the teenage if these factors are not positively shaped it can affect the future life of the child. In urban areas children are exposed to varied situations but in rural area children may not get such opportunities and their self concept may remain comparatively low. It is considered

that good communication has positive impact on self concept but it may not be always true. It was observed in a study in rural area, that correlation between self concept and communication skills was negative (32). The reasons need to be explored in depth. Apart from solitary personality traits, the overall type of personality which includes the cognitive and emotive aspects both is an important factor in individuals overall performance in different professions. Considering the requirements of each profession a certain combination of personality traits is proposed while selecting the candidates. A survey was undertaken under this issue which tried to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and type 'D' personality among the youth aspiring for career in administration. It was found that there was a significant positive correlation between, self awareness and negative affectivity factor of type D. Also there was a significant negative correlation between negative affectivity and self control. Some more interesting findings in this survey highlight the need to identify the right type of persons for special purpose jobs (31).

Leadership

Leadership is again an important area for social psychology applications. It is an interaction between the individual and the social atmosphere around him/her in a specific direction/with a specific objective. Jnana Prabodhini was established to identify leadership potentials in intellectually high ability groups and provide an environment in which these basic potentials are nurtured ultimately to serve national issues. The pioneering experimental study in this area at Jnana Prabodhini was conducted by late Dr. V.V. Pendse, the Founder Director, which paved a strong path for further studies. The above mentioned study tried to evolve a completely novel model of leadership which blends the strengths of traditionally discussed authoritarian and democratic styles of leadership. This novel style was termed as 'Consultative Leadership.' The actual experimental study was undertaken for high school students but the applicability of it has wide scope. It was observed that consultative style was significantly ahead of the other two on important dimensions of group work like 'cohesiveness' and 'popularity of leader, however the researcher expresses the need to train individuals to inculcate this style by repeated exposure (1).

Now, can such training enhance the leadership qualities in the intellectually gifted adolescents? A study focusing on development of leadership qualities in general through informal education in summer camp shows that these abilities can be triggered for some children. What may be reason behind this finding? Is intelligence a prerequisite for leadership? (7). A study conducted on enhancement of decision making ability with reference to social situations can be said to throw some light on this question. Decision making is a crucial ability required to become

an effective leader. This study points out the relationship between intelligence and gender with the decision making, providing interesting findings (3). One more recent research at JP tries to answer this question. It states that a carefully designed program can essentially develop the knowledge of leadership fundamentals, required basic skill set, and attitude formation. But it gives emphasis on the 'out of school exposures' for making the training process more effective (28).

Thus JPIP has been working to explore newer and newer topics in social psychology and put them into application for triggering a positive social change wherever and whenever possible.

It aspires to collaborative research with branches like sociology and gender studies understanding various social issues through empirical and qualitative methods. Important issues in national integration, functional social systems and psychosocial health, will be the main focal areas.

Research put to use

Research in social psychology at JPIP is being put to use in multiple ways. JPIP has been conducting consistent training for parents and adolescent children regarding various aspects of parenting and coping issues. It has also offered special inputs to parents of special need group at both ends so as to maximize the potentials of their children. JPIP has drawn attention of researchers and educationists towards the different social issues covered in order to foster social and national integration and positive change. Counseling for the issues within family and relationships are approached by providing short term and long term courses in self help and counseling. Different research findings are used to decide the thrust areas for development projects in rural and urban set ups. Different tools have emerged as a product of the studies which can be used to study/assess the particular area in depth. Research in leadership has always been a backbone in educational activities at Jnana Prabodhini, and thus many action projects have bloomed out of these studies for different age groups.

What is needed?

We still need to go deep down in complex and broad topics like QOL, and Leadership. Interdisciplinary studies with other social sciences is a need of time which will be emphasized in future. Impact making studies on the socio political policy making systems need to be organized to meet the long term objectives.