

## AN OVERVIEW OF CHILD PSYCHOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES\*

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A review of 144 studies done in the area of Child Psychology from the late sixties up to 1980 was made. Trends across all the studies were looked for in terms of the following categories: age and sex of subjects, the locale of the study (rural or urban), methods used, and the areas of development covered. It was found that most of the studies dealt with sex differentials, were done in urban settings, involved one-session designs, made use of tests, and dealt with the socio-emotional development of children. On the basis of the findings, recommendations were made regarding the possible focus of future researches. The need for child psychologists to be more involved in defining and conceptualizing researches, as well as in applying research findings to existing situations, was also pointed out.

The field of child psychology in the Philippines may be facing a decade of ferment and growth in the eighties that is unparalleled at any other time in its history.

This prediction is based on a review of contemporary events which have a direct bearing on the developmental trends in this area of study. One of the most positive factors that can be cited is the organization of the Samahang Pilipino sa Sikolohiya ng Bata (SPSB) this year by psychologists from the Philippine Normal College (PNC), the Child and Youth Research Center (CYRC) and the University of the Philippines (UP). With

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Professor Ester Reyes of the Philippine Normal College as its first president, three bimonthly scientific meetings have been held so far. The meetings have proven to be exciting venues where child psychologists from different institutions, for the first time, have shared their views and discussed research work in detail. Such an interaction certainly augurs an enrichment of the field.

For instance, it was in one such meeting that the CYRC announced its information dissemination drive and the Research Department of the Philippine Normal College shared the publications of their studies on Piaget's theory. As an institution on child study, the Philippine Normal College is in the enviable position of being able to integrate the training of pre-school educators and child psychologists, administer a pre-school and conduct, as well as publish, research on children.

Although only three institutions have been active in the organization of the group, membership is open to professionals and

students interested in child study. This First National Seminar that we are having today is being managed by child psychology students of Grace Aguiling-Dalisay at the University of the Philippines, but they have attempted to involve as many institutions as possible and the lectures are delivered by professionals in different areas of child development. The SPSB then appears to be the forum for the integration of activities and the charting of the direction Philippine Child Psychology could possibly take.

A specific area that bears watching is child clinical psychology. The late seventies brought home to the Philippines its first child clinical psychologist, Dr. Ma. Lourdes Arellano Carandang. With a keen awareness of how the child's culture defines problems as well as their solutions, she and her students both at the Ateneo de Manila University and the University of the Philippines are helping develop techniques for child clinical psychology in the country.

Another current trend predicting the growth of the field is the establishment by the government of nationwide programs for children such as the Mental Feeding Program and the Children's Communication Center. There certainly will be a need for child psychologists to be more directly involved in the formulation and implementation of public policy relevant to the needs of the children. Here too we shall see how the research expertise of the child psychologists can improve the everyday life of the Filipino child.

The proliferation of pre-school, almost literally in every corner, suggests another area demanding the attention of child psychologists. There appears to be a need to re-examine policy regarding the establishment and regulation of such schools. As a group, perhaps the SPSB could lobby on this issue while presenting evaluation research along this line. Proposed changes in the elementary

school curricula also suggest another area where much research can be done. Because the teaching of civics and values are among those to be given serious emphasis, the role of the school in political socialization and value inculcation can be the focus of investigations. Citizenship education will be stagnant unless the effect of these curricular innovations on the child's behavior are verified. Then too can we raise a basic question about the content of such curriculum for examination: are we to teach loyalty to country or loyalty to a specific government or person?

Some schools have also begun to require both practical arts and home economics courses for males and females alike. Thus, boys and girls all learn to sew, embroider and cook as well as do carpentry work and gardening. How does such a curricular change affect the children's concepts and attitudes toward sex roles? Are parents willing to let go of their "sugar-and-spice" versus "snakes-and-puppy-dog-tails" categories of their own children? Only a well-designed study could answer such questions adequately and again, it beckons the child psychologist.

Certainly, children in poverty must pre-occupy our attention. If we must be activists, or if we must put our research into action, then here are the children who must be liberated in their psychosocial development. Much of the work that has been done in Philippine child psychology focuses on the urban middle-class child and therefore, the child in poverty, neglected as he is in society, is barely mentioned in child psychology. Considering the social current surrounding the Filipino child, as clinical psychologists, we must exercise our duty to inquire.

Aside from looking into the social context of child psychology, which could have a bearing on its development in the eighties, a survey of the literature could likewise reveal trends and point out possible directions. The

rest of this paper will therefore discuss some of the findings in a review done on 144 studies conducted between the late sixties and 1980. Necessarily, certain limits were imposed on the scope of the review. First, the survey focuses on published literature, except for some studies which were obtained from compilations of student researches done at the University of the Philippines and theses submitted in various colleges and universities in Metro Manila.

The general strategy employed was to examine trends across all the studies in terms of the following categories: age and sex of subjects, the locale of the study (rural or urban), methods used and the areas of development covered.<sup>1</sup> In the original monograph, an area by area analysis was also made.

#### General Trends: The Who, What, How and Where of Child Psychology Research in the Philippines

Table 1  
*Major aspects of child psychology researches done in the Philippines  
(1968 to 1980)*

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Age of subjects</i>			<i>Duration of study</i>		
0 - 2	17	11.8	short, one-session	50	34.7
3 - 6	45	31.2	1 month	32	22.2
7 - 12	79	54.9	1 month up to 1 yr.	22	15.3
13 & up	3	2.1	1 year	3	2.1
			Unspecified	37	25.7
<i>Sex of subjects</i>			<i>Methods used*</i>		
Male	8	5.6	Experimental	32	17.7
Female	3	2.1	Field	18	9.9
Both	114	79.2	Testing	56	30.9
Unspecified	19	13.2	Survey	24	13.2
			Interview	25	13.8
<i>Locale</i>			Observation	15	8.3
Urban	78	54.2	Others	11	6.1
Rural	15	10.4	<i>Areas covered*</i>		
Urban & Rural	20	13.9	Physical	18	11.5
Unspecified	31	21.5	Socio-emotional	68	43.6
			Cognitive-perceptual	50	32.0
			Language	20	12.8

\* The cross-listing of some studies in more than one category accounts for the higher total N's for Methods Used and Areas covered.

*Who were being studied?*

Of the 144 studies, 79 (54.8 percent) were done on school-age children between the ages of 7 and 12. The next most frequently studied group were the 3-6 year olds (45, or 31.2 percent). These two age groups together account for almost 90 percent of the studies conducted over a span of 16 years. Relatively neglected were adolescents (only 3 studies or 2.11 percent) and children below 3 (17 studies or 11.8 percent).

As indicated in Table 1, most of the studies done have dealt with sex differentials: 114 or 79.2 percent included both sexes; 8 or 5.6 percent males only, 3 or 2.1 percent females only and 19 or 13.2 percent without information as to the sex of their subjects.

*Where did the studies take place?*

Approximately 54 percent of the studies were done in urban settings (principally Metro Manila) while only 10.4 percent were done in rural areas. Twenty studies (13.9 percent) involved rural-urban comparisons and again, some 21 percent did not specify the setting of their work.

*How much time was required to complete the studies?*

Most were one-session studies lasting from a few minutes to an hour (34.7 percent) while 22.2 percent were done within a month. Some twenty-two studies (15.3 percent) were done for more than a month but less than a year and only 2.1 percent were conducted for more than a year.

*Which methods were being used?*

The use of tests (30.9 percent) was predominant over surveys (13.2 percent), interviews (13.8 percent), observation (8.3 percent) as well as over experimental (17.6 percent), and field (9.9 percent) studies.

*What areas were being studied?*

Studies dealing with the socio-emotional development of children (68 percent) preoccupied the attention of researchers. Cognitive-perceptual development accounted for 32 percent of the total. Language was the topic of twenty studies (12.8 percent) while 18 or 11.5 percent dealt with physical development.

*Implications*

What do all these statistics imply? Considering the number of studies that have been done, there appears to be no lack of interest in the study of child psychology in the Philippines. However, the typical researcher concentrated on the urban pre-school or school-aged child, meeting him briefly in a single session and exploring an aspect of his socio-emotional development, with testing as the strategy of choice. In turn, this suggests a major point: the lack of a well-thought-out program of research, with convenience, more than any other variable, determining the choice of setting, subjects and strategy.

The typical researcher also appeared to be a student doing a paper, thesis or dissertation. The purpose for undertaking the studies appeared to be mainly directed towards the fulfillment of course requirements. More often than not, the research problem was abandoned after the course or degree was hurdled. Research then is sporadic with too many studies prefaced as exploratory or preliminary. While it is true that certain areas of study are relatively well-researched, (e.g. cognitive development involving Piagetian tasks), there are many more which have attracted only cursory attention. All these imply the lack of a program of research which could be commonly shared by child psychologists.

On the basis of the foregoing therefore, some specific suggestions are being made towards the development of a future research program. First, it is clear that more researches have to be done on infancy and

adolescence. The researcher would also have to move out of the urban centers and make more studies within the rural context or with rural-urban comparison groups. Another clear shortcoming of the studies covered in this review is the relatively brief encounter between the subjects and the researcher. These short one-shot studies obscure the possibility of studying child behavior in relevant contexts and over longer periods of time. Thus, the developmental aspects that are so important in the appreciation of child study are seemingly lost to the researcher.

To this last point, a related suggestion can be made for the researcher to look beyond testing and utilize alternative modes of study which would allow for a more meaningful investigation of child behavior. Aside from raising the general question concerning the reliability and validity of the tests used in these studies, another basic point can be made. Observational studies in the tradition of Barker and his associates, for instance, have never been done. And yet, it is such naturalistic approaches that contribute towards the discovery of patterns of behavior which could lead to more culturally relevant conceptualizations of Filipino child psychology. The *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* or the *Santiago-Enriquez* methods emphasizing naturalistic approaches have been used in only 8 of the studies reviewed (student papers done at the University of the Philippines).

The data further imply that professional child psychologists have to be involved in a systematic program of research where priorities can be defined and well conceptualized and better controlled studies can be undertaken. In much of the work that has been done, there is a deficiency of appropriate discussion of findings, suggesting in turn, a lack of adequate familiarity with

theories and concepts of child psychology. A professional child psychologist could do so much more with the data. For instance, data on sex differences are available in all areas of development. This can be systematized as data for personality development, socialization or individual differences.

Apart from contributing to basic research, the child psychologist is also in a position to relate research findings to applied situations. A future program of research should also envision this relationship between basic and applied work. It can likewise be noted that the researchers did not explicitly address themselves to ethical considerations in conducting research with children. However, the vulnerability of children should be enough to urge the strictest observance of ethical standards in research.

In summary, there appears to be a need for child psychologists to be more committed to the study of Filipino children. It is this basic commitment which would guide a more critical approach to child psychology research in the Philippines. Child psychologists as a group could define research priorities, thus paving the way for coordination in the future. Also, as a group, it may be easier to surmount the problem of funding — the culprit behind the lack of sustained high quality studies in child psychology.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This strategy was modeled after Rae Carlson's review of personality studies in his article, "Where is the person in personality research?" *Psychological Bulletin*, 75, 1971, 203-219.

For the complete listing of all the studies which were reviewed in this article, please contact the author through the Department of Psychology, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Q.C.