

# Gender differences in personality development

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*This article has been extracted from a tracer study\* that looks at the effects of training for preschool teachers on the children they have cared for in the Embu district of Kenya. Preschool teacher training in Embu District is carried out by the District Centre for Early Childhood Education (DICECE) Embu, part of a national network (the National Centre for Early Childhood Education – NACECE). Embu District was selected for this study because it has a fairly homogenous rural community with a varied climate and environment. The two year DICECE programme provides in-service and on the job training covering child development, health and nutrition, ECD curriculum, and so on.*

Most respondents were of the opinion that girls have better developed personalities than boys. They said that the girls are more disciplined, respectable, reliable, honest, dependable and trustworthy. One of the focus groups of teachers had this to say:

*Girls are more trusted and reliable than the boys. In this school, we normally depend more on girl prefects because they are more reliable.*

Much of the credit for better personality development among the girls was given to the mothers. The

respondents argued that girls are at home with their mothers most of the time and the mothers spend a lot of time counselling them. In addition, most of the mothers are good role models for their girls. The girls were said to attend church more regularly than the boys, and in church they are taught how to lead good moral lives.

The boys, on the other hand, lack good role models. The majority of the fathers are not often available to mould the character of their sons. A good number drink heavily and smoke in the presence of their sons. Their sons tend to copy

their fathers, hence engaging in truancy from a very early age.

The head teachers also complained that many parents allow their sons to roam about and do not insist on them engaging in productive work while at home. This freedom makes the boys more vulnerable to bad peer influence, hence their poor personality development. Girls, on the other hand, are expected to be at home most of the time and to engage in productive work. This leaves them with very little time to engage in undesirable behaviours.

## The role of the school

The majority of the groups attributed the good personality development of pupils to well-behaved teachers and head teachers whom the pupils emulate. The participants also emphasised that the teachers provide guidance and counselling for the pupils. This helps the pupils to acquire good morals and character. These responses are significant in that the teachers are viewed by all as the citadel of moral training and character development, providing important role models for pupils. Even the parents appear to



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delegate this most important responsibility to the teachers. If it is true that the teacher remains the most important factor for influencing the overall growth and development of pupils, it is no wonder the parents were extremely critical of teachers who are not committed to their work and who drink and smoke in the presence of their pupils.

#### Poor discipline at home

Poor discipline at home was yet another important factor cited for poor personality development. The majority of the participants said that in some homes, the parents provide little moral guidance to their children and do not bother to instil firm discipline in them. They leave the children to do what they want, including roaming about in the

markets and shops. This makes the children vulnerable to bad peer influence and bad habits.

The participants underscored the role of fathers in the moral development of their children. Their failure to provide good role models, guidance and counselling was said to have an adverse effect on the personality development of their children, particularly the boys. The participants were very concerned about the declining role of fathers in providing moral guidance for their children.

have changed tremendously and some of the value systems that governed families in the traditional society are no longer applicable. Parents are today increasingly being left to define their own value systems and the moral codes of behaviour that they think are good for their children. This is a difficult task. In addition, different families end up emphasising different values and moral codes of behaviour, a practice that tends to cause confusion for their children when they socialise with their peers. ○

\* Njenga A & Kabiru M (2001), *In the web of cultural transition: a tracer study of children in Embu District, Kenya*, Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections No. 14 (see page 58).

The issue of disciplining children has become a serious problem for most parents today because of the social changes that have taken place in Kenya. Most of the parents have been caught up in the web of cultural transition where there are no longer clearly defined values and moral codes of behaviour that should be instilled in children and young people. Lifestyles