



Discipline Strategies of Vietnamese and Australian Mothers for in Regulating Children's Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The discipline strategies used for regulating children's behaviour were investigated in Vietnamese and Australian mothers using hypothetical child behaviour vignettes. An online survey was administered to 47 mothers from each cultural group. Mothers rated their likelihood of using a particular discipline technique to the different conventional and moral transgressions made by the child depicted in the vignettes. Parenting daily hassles experiences were also assessed using the Parenting Daily Hassles Scale (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). The key finding was that mothers from both cultural groups did not differ in the discipline strategies selected; both groups favoured inductive reasoning over power assertion. Moral transgressions had higher ratings for both types of discipline techniques, which reflect the greater perceived importance of moral over conventional transgressions. Mothers employed more reasoning strategies with boys than girls and slightly more power assertion with girls than boys. Mothers from both cultural groups experienced a similar level of parenting daily hassles. These results highlight commonalities in discipline strategies and childrearing goals including a concern for longer term socialization goals held by mothers from both cultural groups.

Keywords: Discipline strategies, Vietnamese, Australian, parenting daily hassles, power assertion, inductive reasoning, vignettes

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 7 February 2013

Accepted: 27 July 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Mothers in all cultures discipline or regulate children's behaviour in ways that are congruent with their values, beliefs and child rearing goals. Through disciplinary episodes and experiences, children

gradually learn right from wrong and learn to make distinctions between what are considered appropriate and inappropriate behaviours (Horton, Ray, & Cohen, 2001). As such, discipline offers a means through which young children internalise parental expectations and acquire the values and behaviours esteemed by their culture (Hoffman, 1983). Many of the everyday circumstances that motivate maternal interventions are common across societies such as non-compliance with family behavioural standards, eating, sleeping, and self-care behaviours (Wendland, Maggi, & Wolff, 2010). The present study examines the reported discipline strategies employed by Vietnamese and Australian mothers in regulating their children's every day behaviours depicted in short vignettes.

Considerable research has been devoted to establishing associations between maternal disciplinary practices and their outcomes in terms of achieving child socialisation goals, predominantly in Western cultures (e.g., Critchley & Sanson, 2006; Gershoff, 2002; Rudy & Grusec, 2006; Wendland, Maggi, & Wolff, 2010). Two methods, specifically, power assertion and inductive reasoning have been linked with a broad range of cognitive, social, and emotional consequences for children (Critchley & Sanson, 2006). Inductive reasoning is an authoritative method of discipline whereby caregivers provide children with standards to adhere to and use rationales that emphasise the consequences of the child's behaviour on others (Horton et al., 2001). Through reasoning, parents encourage

favourable child outcomes such as improved self-control, increased moral internalisation and obedience to parent-imposed rules in the absence of a parent (Hoffman, 1983). In contrast, power assertion (e.g., physical punishment, verbal abuse, and withdrawal of privileges) is a more rigid form of discipline where, without explanation, parents achieve the child's compliance through enforcing authority or physical advantage (Wendland et al., 2010). Power assertion has been connected with various negative child consequences such as antisocial behaviour, reduced moral internalisation, and interpersonal relationship difficulties (Gershoff, 2002; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). In contrast, the use of more effort based cognitive approaches such as reasoning are considered to facilitate children's long-term internalisation of parental values regarding appropriate behaviour (Critchley & Sanson, 2006).

Socialisation Goals and Child Discipline Strategies

Previous research has found that mothers do not adhere to one specific discipline approach when managing children's misbehaviours (Dix, 1991). Rather, they vary their approaches dependent on whether the behaviour breaks moral standards (e.g., stealing, hitting or injuring another person) (Critchley & Sanson, 2006) or breaches socio-conventional ideals (e.g., spilling food, creating a mess) (Smetana, Kochanska, & Chuang, 2000). Kuczynski (1984) argues that discipline incidents occur within the framework of a long-

term, continuing mother-child relationship in which mothers have forthcoming expectations or socialisation goals for their child. Consequently, mothers tend to use power assertion if their goal for the child is immediate compliance (e.g., a child's breach of conventional principles) and reasoning in the event of a moral violation (Chilamkurti & Milner, 1993; Nucci & Turiel, 1978). Moral transgressions are regarded as more important than the breach of a temporary, situation-specific matter as involved in conventional transgressions. Moral breaches are also considered to be more critical in terms of long-term developmental outcomes of the child.

Conflicting findings exist regarding mothers' use of power assertion and reasoning across moral and conventional contexts. Critchley and Sanson (2006) found that power assertion increased when mothers responded to a moral misdemeanor compared to when a conventional rule was transgressed. Conversely, other studies (e.g., Dawber & Kuczynski, 1999; Grusec, Dix, & Mills, 1982) have found that mothers used more reasoning than power assertion with their child when both conventional and moral principles were violated. There is also evidence suggesting that mothers use power assertion and reasoning in combination across both behavioural contexts (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980). Moreover, Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow and King (1979) found that mothers who combined forceful demands with consistent rationales for controlling their children's misdeeds were more successful in encouraging generalised

child compliance. Furthermore, research by Cheyne and Walters (1969) found that when used concurrently, power assertion and reasoning promoted the child's overall resistance to temptation compared to when power assertion was used alone.

Parenting Discipline Strategies and Child's Sex

Currently, there has been little research conducted on how discipline strategies are influenced by the child's sex. Some studies (e.g., Kuczynski, 1984; Smetana et al., 2000) have found that mothers use more authoritarian parenting styles with boys than with girls. In line with this, Lytton and Romney (1991) have reported that physical punishment is more frequently used with boys. Furthermore, Smetana (1989) proposed that mothers reason more frequently with girls than with boys.

Vietnamese Childrearing Practices

Thus far, a paucity of research has investigated Vietnamese childrearing with most research conducted on Vietnamese mothers in the context of immigration and acculturation rather than mainland Vietnamese mothers, that is, mothers living in Vietnam. The existing research has yielded conflicting results. Research by Segal (2000) on Vietnamese refugees living in the United States assessed mothers' responses on the Child Abuse Potential Inventory (CAPI) and found that many favoured using physical punishment over other methods of discipline. However, when validated against the Conflict Tactics Scale

(CTS), physical punishment was seldom reported as a chosen method.

Papps, Walker, Trimboli and Trimboli (1995) assessed mothers' responses to a variety of vignettes depicting child behaviour contexts requiring adult intervention. They found that migrant Vietnamese mothers reported using more inductive reasoning with their children (31.7%) compared to Anglo-Australian mothers (11.8%). Additionally, Vietnamese mothers reported using less physical power assertive methods (e.g., smacking, slapping, hitting) (36.7%) than Anglo-Australian mothers (57.7%). Moreover, Tokura (1982) cited in Papps et al. (1995) observed that Vietnamese mothers were relatively permissive in their approach to childrearing. Based on this research, power assertion appears to be a less customary form of discipline used by Vietnamese mothers. An additional consideration is that according to Kolar and Soriano (2000), discipline is customarily assigned to the father in Vietnamese culture.

The Relationship between Discipline Strategies and Parental Daily Hassles

A factor that influences the choice of discipline strategy is the level of parenting stress experienced. Within most families, mothers are consistently challenged by the demands of children and childrearing. Research has shown that an accumulative effect over time may represent a significant source of stress for mothers (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). This, in turn, may adversely affect the parent-child relationship and lead to forceful, authoritarian

childrearing behaviours (Crouch & Behl, 2001).

The Current Study

The current study investigates the reported discipline strategies utilised by Vietnamese and Australian mothers for everyday conventional and moral transgressions of their child depicted in short vignettes (see Appendix A). The perceived level of daily hassles experienced by mothers was also assessed using the Parenting Daily Hassles Scale (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990) (see Appendix B).

Based on previous research by Grusec and Kuczynski (1980), who found that mothers vary their practices according to the child's transgression type, it was predicted that mothers would report more use of power assertion for conventional transgressions and greater use of reasoning for moral situations. Moreover, as research suggests that physical punishment is used more frequently with boys and mothers provide more explanations and rationales to girls (Lytton & Romney, 1991; Smetana, 1989), it was expected that mothers would report greater use of power assertion with boys and more reasoning strategies with girls.

As previous research (e.g., Crouch & Behl, 2001) has found a relationship between higher parental stress and more rigid, authoritarian parenting practices, it was also predicted that mothers would use more power assertion strategies with increased frequency and intensity of reported parenting daily hassles.

METHOD

Participants

The participants consisted of 47 Vietnamese mothers (age: $M = 31.40$, $SD = 5.03$, range = 26-50 years) and 47 Australian mothers (age: $M = 31.15$, $SD = 5.37$, range = 23-50 years). The Vietnamese mothers were born and lived in Vietnam, and the Australian mothers were similarly born and lived in Australia. There was no significant difference in the age of the mothers from the two cultural groups ($p > .1$)

Participants were initially invited to take part in the online survey if they were a mother of at least one child between 3 and 10 years old. Mothers completed a questionnaire comprising information relating to age, ethnicity, employment status, and level of education. Details relating to children's age and sex were also obtained. Comparisons of socio-demographic characteristics of the Australian and Vietnamese samples are provided as percentages in Table 1.

Materials and Procedure

The online survey consisted of two assessment instruments: (1) vignettes depicting conventional and moral transgressions made by the child (see Appendix A) and (2) the Parenting Daily Hassles Scale (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990) (see Appendix B) to assess the perceived levels of daily parenting stresses associated with raising young children. All materials were originally developed in English then translated and back-translated into Vietnamese. Every item on each

questionnaire was carefully examined for accuracy and cultural relevance.

Conventional and Moral Transgression Vignettes

The assessment instrument employed to assess the discipline strategies used by mothers was developed and adapted from vignettes used in previous studies (e.g., Conroy Hess, Azuma, & Kashiwagi, 1980; Critchley & Sanson, 2006; Papps et al., 1995; Wendland et al., 2010). Vignette methodology has been used comprehensively in parenting research and has been comparatively successful in achieving reliable and valid evaluations of how mothers react to their child across several behavioural contexts (e.g., Dawber & Kuczynski, 1999; Hastings & Grusec, 1998). Vignettes were appropriate for this study given the difficulties in observing mothers from both cultural backgrounds in a variety of specific contexts and environments. Mothers were required to report (1 = never, 6 = frequently) on a 6-point Likert scale how often they used four power assertive and three reasoning discipline strategies across eighteen hypothetical contexts. The mothers were presented with eighteen scenarios involving everyday occurrences where behaviour intervention is necessary in the home or social situation. The items comprised two child misbehaviour transgression types (conventional and moral), which were presented to the participants in a random order. The four power assertive choices included the mother's use of control

TABLE 1

Background characteristics of the Vietnamese and Australian mothers. Percentages of the sample are in parentheses.

Cha Characteristics	Australian <i>n</i> = 47 (%)	Vietnamese <i>n</i> = 47 (%)	Total <i>N</i> = 94 (%)
Ethnicity			
Born in Australia	47 (100)	--	47 (50)
Born in Vietnam	--	47 (100)	47 (50)
Number of Children			
One to Three	44 (94)	47 (100)	91 (97)
Four to Six	3 (6)	--	3 (3)
Child's Age Group			
3 to 6 years	16 (34)	40 (85)	56 (88)
7 to 10 years	31 (66)	7 (15)	38 (40)
Sex of Child			
Boy	24 (51)	21 (45)	45 (48)
Girl	23 (49)	26 (55)	29 (62)
Education			
Primary School	--	--	--
High School	8 (17)	2 (4)	10 (11)
Certificate/ Diploma	15 (32)	--	15 (16)
Bachelor Degree	20 (43)	18 (38)	38 (81)
Post Graduate Degree	4 (9)	27 (57)	31 (66)
Employment Status			
Full Time	10 (21)	38 (81)	48 (51)
Part time	9 (19)	6 (13)	15 (16)
Casual	2 (4)	2 (4)	4 (4)
Parent / Caregiver	10 (21)	--	10 (11)
Student	16 (34)	--	16 (17)
Unemployed	--	1 (2)	1 (1)

over her child by *physical punishment, threatening the child, raising her voice, and withdrawing privileges*. The three inductive reasoning choices focused on approaches which involve the mother teaching the child a more appropriate way of behaving, i.e., *explain to the child that there are more acceptable ways of behaving, explain to*

the child what the effects of their behaviour might be, and demonstrate to the child a different way of behaving.

Parenting Daily Hassles

The Parenting Daily Hassles Scale (PDHS) developed by Crnic and Greenberg (1990) was designed to assess how intensely a

mother is affected by different stresses related to parenting. The PDHS comprises 20 items designed to reflect the frequency of occurrences of challenging child behaviours (items 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16) and the intensity of various tasks related to childrearing (items 1, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, 17, and 20). Item examples included “*continually cleaning up messes of toys or food*,” “*meal-time difficulties with picky eaters*,” “*the kids resist or struggle with you over bed-time*,” etc. Mothers were asked to indicate on a 5-point intensity scale (1 = no hassle to 5 = big hassle) how irritating each item was to them in the last 6 months, and the frequency with which those hassles occurred on a 4-point scale (1 = rarely to 4 = constantly). To obtain total scores, frequency and intensity ratings were obtained by summing the *frequency of hassle* and *intensity of hassle* scores on all items respectively. A reliability analysis found the PDHS to have sufficient internal consistencies, with alpha coefficients of .81 for frequency and .90 for intensity. Further reliability and validity data presented in Crnic and Greenberg (1990) indicate the PDHS as a reliable measure of parenting stress.

In the current study, three items were excluded due to lack of cultural relevance, thus leaving a total of 17 items. These were: “*baby-sitters are hard to find*,” “*the kids' schedules (like pre-school or other activities) interfere with meeting your own household needs*,” and “*difficulties in getting privacy (e.g., in the bathroom)*.” After excluding these items, a subsequent reliability analysis further revealed

adequate internal consistencies, with alpha coefficients of .85 for frequency and .78 for intensity.

RESULTS

An analysis of variance was conducted for cultural group (Vietnamese, Australian) by child's sex (boy, girl) by transgression type (conventional, moral) by discipline strategy (power assertion, inductive reasoning) with transgression type and discipline strategy as within-participant factors and cultural group and sex as between-participant factors. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2. There was a significant main effect of discipline strategy, $F(1, 93) = 657.81, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .880$, with mothers reporting preferred usage of inductive reasoning over power assertion. There was a significant main effect of vignette, $F(1, 93) = 268.23, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .749$, with higher responses to the moral transgressions than conventional transgressions. Cultural group was notably not significantly different.

There was not a significant main effect of child's sex. However, there was an interaction effect between discipline strategy and child's sex, $F(1, 93) = 8.77, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .089$. Post hoc analyses revealed that inductive reasoning was more likely to be used with boys ($M = 6.13, SD = .84$) than girls ($M = 5.65, SD = 1.02$), $t(93) = 2.47, p < .05$, and power assertion was marginally more likely to be used with girls ($M = 2.67, SD = .78$) than boys ($M = 2.36, SD = .77$), $t(93) = 1.94, p = .055$. There were no other significant effects ($ps > .1$).

The level of reported parenting hassles experienced across cultures was compared. Results indicated that there were no significant difference in frequency or intensity of daily hassles reported by Vietnamese (frequency: $M = 2.15$, $SD = .53$, intensity: $M = 2.03$, $SD = .49$) and Australian mothers (frequency: $M = 2.05$, $SD = .45$, intensity: $M = 2.05$, $SD = .63$).

In addition, the relationship between reported intensity and frequency of daily parenting hassles and the use of power assertion was examined for mothers from both cultural groups using Pearson's product-moment correlations. The results revealed no significant relationship between frequency and intensity scores on the PDHS and the use of power assertion for either cultural group.

DISCUSSION

A key finding of the present study was that there were no significant differences in discipline strategies reported by Vietnamese and Australian mothers to the conventional and moral transgressions depicted in the vignettes. This result highlights the commonalities in childrearing and socialisation goals that mothers share in these two cultural groups. The overall goal of disciplining children is to encourage children to conform to parental expectations and values. This shared discipline goal held by both Vietnamese and Australian mothers may explain the commonalities in responses made by these two cultural groups. Discipline offers a means through which young children can acquire the

TABLE 2

Descriptive statistics for the mean rating scores on power assertion and inductive reasoning among Vietnamese and Australian mothers towards boys and girls for conventional and moral transgressions. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

		Power assertion	Inductive reasoning
A. Conventional transgression			
Vietnamese	Child's sex		
	Boy	2.09 (.62)	5.83 (.95)
	Girl	2.22 (.63)	5.11 (1.09)
	Total	2.16 (.62)	5.43 (1.06)
Australian	Boy	1.87 (.71)	5.86 (.95)
	Girl	2.41 (.69)	5.42 (1.20)
	Total	2.13 (.74)	5.65 (1.09)
B. Moral transgression			
Vietnamese	Boy	2.81 (.89)	6.38 (.78)
	Girl	2.85 (.96)	5.86 (1.07)
	Total	2.83 (.92)	6.10 (1.04)
Australian	Boy	2.69 (1.04)	6.44 (.78)
	Girl	3.24 (1.07)	6.26 (.83)
	Total	2.96 (1.09)	6.36 (.80)

values and behaviours valued by their parents and particular culture (Hoffman, 1983). In a review of cross-cultural research, Heath (1995) similarly observed more commonalities than differences in parenting and parental expectations of children; however she also notes that more fine-grained analyses are likely to reveal differences.

Mothers, in general, reported that they favoured the usage of inductive reasoning over power assertion for regulating their child's behavior. This reflects the perceived importance of longer term socialization and childrearing goals held by the mothers. Other researchers (e.g., Dawber & Kuczynski, 1999; Grusec, Dix, & Mills, 1982) have also found that mothers used more reasoning than power assertion with their child. The use of more effort based cognitive approaches such as reasoning are more likely to facilitate children's long-term internalisation of parental values regarding appropriate behaviour (Critchley & Sanson, 2006). This indicates that mothers from both cultural groups assign importance to long-term socialisation goals (to support child moral internalisation) by explaining conventions and consequences of behaviours (Kuczynski, 1984).

In the current study, moral transgressions were rated as higher in terms of both inductive reasoning and power assertion in comparison with conventional transgressions. This is consistent with the view that moral transgressions have greater perceived importance in terms of developmental outcomes of the child in comparison to

conventional transgressions, where there are more temporary, situation-specific breaches. This concurs with Critchley and Sanson (2006), who found that power assertion increased when mothers responded to a moral misdemeanor compared to when a conventional rule was transgressed. Other studies (e.g., Dawber & Kuczynski, 1999; Grusec, Dix, & Mills, 1982) have similarly found that mothers used more reasoning than power assertion with their child when both conventional and moral principles were violated.

Interestingly, the child's sex influenced mothers' disciplinary practices. Mothers reported using more inductive reasoning with boys than girls, and slightly more power assertion with girls than boys. This is somewhat incongruent with prior research, which has reported that mothers use more power assertion with boys and more reasoning with girls (e.g., Kuczynski, 1984; Smetana et al., 2000). The use of slightly more frequent power assertion with girls may indicate greater socialisation pressures imposed on girls than boys. Consequently, mothers may be less accepting of girls' deviant behaviour and therefore respond more punitively to their misdeeds. Moreover, mothers may feel that they need to use more reasoning with boys to promote long-term compliance to rules.

Mothers' experiences of daily hassles did not differ significantly between the two cultural groups. Furthermore, mothers' use of power assertion was not significantly correlated with the frequency and intensity of minor stresses experienced. This contrasts

with previous findings by Crouch and Behl (2001), who suggested that higher occurrences of parenting hassles leads to harsh, authoritarian childrearing behaviours. Thus, in the current study, there was no relationship found between the frequency and intensity of hassles and mothers' use of power assertive discipline.

One obvious criticism of the current study is the use of vignettes to examine discipline strategies. While vignette methodology has been used extensively in parenting studies with relative success, the extent to which mothers do what they say is not known. The method relies on reported practices rather than actual behaviours. The contexts outlined in the vignettes are open to interpretation in terms of level of seriousness or triviality. In order to gain a more comprehensive view of discipline and childrearing behaviours in these two cultural groups, in future, it would be beneficial to use additional methodologies, including interviews and actual observations. Research also needs to include fathers and other family members who also play an important role in caring and disciplining the child.

In conclusion, this study has investigated the impact of the type of transgression and child's sex on the discipline strategies adopted by Australian and Vietnamese mothers living in their respective countries. The type of discipline strategies used is related to the nature of the child's transgressions as well as child's sex. This research has important parental educational implications, particularly in relation to physical discipline, which can have long term negative consequences. It is important

that training programs support parents in adopting disciplinary practices that are associated with positive outcomes for both the children and their families.

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APPENDIX

Vignettes

Please read the vignettes below and answer (Never 1----2----3----4----5----6 Frequently) how often you use the following behaviours with your child:

- Physical Punishment (smacking, hitting, slapping)
- Threaten Child (with punishment)
- Raise voice (scolding, shouting, yelling orders, threats)
- Take away some of the child's privileges (deprivation of watching TV, playing games, grounding, withdrawal of pocket money)
- Explain to the child that there are more acceptable ways of behaving
- Explain to the child what the possible effects of their behaviour
- Demonstrate to your child a different way of behaving

You are at home with your child who is thirsty. He / she would like to get himself / herself a drink. In the process of getting it, he / she knocks it over and makes a big mess (C)

Your child has been playing outside and just run through some mud. He/she forgets to wipe his / her feet before coming into the house. He / she gets mud all over the clean floor (C)

You are at home with your child when his / her friend comes over to play. Your child is not looking where he / she is going. Accidentally, your child knocks the other child over making him / her cry (C)

Your child is bouncing his / her ball in the house. The ball bounces off the wall and knocks over your favourite ornament. It breaks into pieces (C)

Your child is running through the house and is not looking where he / she is going. He / she accidentally knocks into you while you are holding a hot drink. You burn your hand (C)

Your child is running to the kitchen carrying an empty plate back to the sink. He / she trips and drops the plate. It smashes all over the floor (C)

You are at home with your child and have made him / her lunch. When you serve the meal, your child refuses to eat it (C)

You are at home with your child and it's very quiet. You go and check on him / her and discover that he / she is scribbling on the table (M)

Your child has just come home from visiting his / her friend. He is hiding something behind his / her back. You discover that your child has deliberately brought home a toy that does not belong to him / her (M)

Your child is playing outside with friends, and you see him / her throw a ball through the neighbour's window and it breaks. When you go outside, your child tells you that it was not him / her who did it (M)

Your child is playing with his / her friend. His / her friend shows your child a new toy that he / she just received. Your child wants the new toy and tries to grab it from his / her friend. However, his / her friend refuses to let him / her have it. Your child becomes angry, hence hits his/her friend and snatches the toy away (M)

Your child asks you for money for sweets. You say "No". The child later takes money from your purse to buy sweets (M)

You are at home with your child when it is almost time for dinner. He / she asks to go outside to play with his / her friends, but you say "No". Your child goes out to plays with his / her friend anyway (M)

Your child is playing outside with friends. An old man walks past and your child starts to imitate him in front of the other children. They all start to laugh. The old man's feelings are hurt (M)

APPENDIX

Parenting Daily Hassles Scale (PDHS) (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990).

The statements below describe numerous events that routinely occur in families with young children. These events sometimes make life difficult. Please read each item and indicate how often it happens to you (rarely, sometimes, a lot, or constantly). Next, indicate how much of a hassle (low to high) you feel that it has been for you FOR THE PAST 6 MONTHS.

EVENT

1. Continually cleaning up messes of toys or food.
2. Being nagged, whined at, complained to.
3. Meal-time difficulties with picky eaters, complaining etc.
4. The kids do not listen or do what they are asked without being nagged.
5. Sibling arguments or fights requiring a 'referee'.
6. The kids demand that you entertain or play with them
7. The kids resist or struggle with you over bed-time.
8. The kids are constantly underfoot, interfering with other chores.
9. The need to keep a constant eye on where the kids are and what they are doing.
10. The kids interrupt adult conversations or interactions.
11. Having to change your plans because of unprecedented child needs.
12. The kids get dirty several times a day requiring changes of clothing.
13. The kids are hard to manage in public (grocery store, shopping centre, and restaurant).
14. Difficulties in getting kids ready for outings and leaving on time.
15. Difficulties in leaving kids for a night out or at school or day care.
16. The kids have difficulties with friends (e.g. fighting, trouble, getting along, or no friends available).
17. Having to run extra errands to meet the kids' needs.