

Parenting Styles and Their Effect on Child Development and Outcome

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ABSTRACT

Parenting is one of the primary influences on a child's development. There is extensive research investigating the association between parenting style and child outcome, from preschool to college years, and in different countries and cultures. This article will review the pertinent literature available on this topic to investigate which aspects of child development are influenced by different parenting styles, and which parenting style is associated with best outcomes. A significant number of studies regarding parenting strategies and their effect demonstrate that parenting style directly influences children's psychosocial development and outcome. Multiple articles published across the world found that the authoritative parenting style was associated with better overall outcome, higher emotional regulation and lower behavioral problems than any other type of parenting. Outcomes such as school achievement, resilience, social competence, adjustment and prosocial behavior were evaluated in the studies we reviewed; best scores were associated with the authoritative parenting style. Clear evidence supports this parenting style and the two dimensions of parenting (warmth and responsiveness) as the most effective strategies in raising children to become competent, successful, and happy adults. Therefore, most experts, including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), recommend the authoritative parenting style, as proven to be strongly associated with positive behavioral outcomes, and good mental health in children and adolescents.

Introduction

One of the oldest dilemmas in psychology involves the "nature versus nurture" debate on the factors that determine the type of person we become as adults, our affective and social characteristics. Which one is more important? A well-known 2015 study done by the Queensland Brain Institute and the VU University of Amsterdam collected and analyzed data from the last 50 years of about 14.5 million pairs of twins (36). The conclusion was that genetics (nature) and environment (nurture) contribute equally to the behavior and traits developed over time.

Diana Baumrind, a developmental psychologist at University of California Berkeley classified parenting styles into 3 categories, commonly used today: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (8). Maccoby and Martin expanded Baumrind's permissive parenting style into permissive style (or indulgent parenting) and neglectful style (or uninvolved parenting style), therefore creating an actual 4-parenting styles model (28). Recent surveys found that in the United States most parents (about 46%) use authoritative parenting, 26% use authoritarian parenting style, 18% permissive parenting style, and 10% neglectful parenting style.

Different parenting styles have significant effects on children's personalities (5), and are presented and analyzed in many studies according to the amount of authority used and affection provided. This is definitely a complex topic and it raises many questions. A warm and supportive home environment, exposure to education activities, stability, parental support and understanding are all factors proven to have a positive influence on raising children to become responsible and happy adults. Another way of viewing parenting is in the form of three directions: the parent's

responsibility for the child's health and safety, the child's preparation for a quality adult life, and the transmission of cultural values (20).

Main Parenting Styles

1. *Authoritative parents* are warm, supportive and responsive, set clear rules and have high expectations, use developmentally appropriate demands, value independence, but also maintain control of children when needed. They communicate often and well with their children, and use positive discipline strategies, like praise and rewards to reinforce positive behavior. (2,27)

2. *Authoritarian parents* show little affection and are unresponsive. They impose strict rules, expect blind obedience, exercise strong control, and do not communicate often with their children. (2, 27)

3. *Permissive parents* are affectionate and responsive, but also indulgent and lenient. They have few or no rules, make few demands, exercise little control, and communicate often (2, 27).

4. *Neglectful parents* are cold, unresponsive, show little affection, and act indifferent and uninvolved. They do not impose rules, make few demands, and do not communicate often. (2,27)

PSDQ (Parenting styles and dimensions questionnaire) was developed in 2001 by Robinson and colleagues based on the well-known Baumrind's model of parenting styles (37). It is a parent-report questionnaire, used worldwide to assess three parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian and permissive), and seven dimensions of parenting.

Other Parenting Styles (new, popular parenting styles, present especially in the United States)

Attachment parenting was introduced by an American pediatrician, Dr. William Sears (40). His book is based on the Attachment Theory developed by psychiatrist John Bowlby. This parenting focuses on connecting early with the baby, the importance of the infancy development time, trying to meet baby's emotional needs through responsiveness, and creating a safe, warm environment (close physical contact and emotional empathy and connection). (27)

Helicopter parenting is a type of over-protective, constant involvement attitude of parents (monitoring and controlling the environment of the child). These parents intervene when a difficult situation arises and reduce the opportunities children need to learn things on their own; therefore, having an overall negative effect and interfering with a child's normal and expected development (kids develop lower self-esteem, poor coping skills, fear failure and become less independent). (27)

Tiger parenting is a strict style, most commonly known and predominant among Chinese American families. The environment is rigid, with strict rules for children, high expectations, and very little freedom or choices. (27)

Free-range parenting is the opposite of helicopter parenting, allowing children to make decisions, which means more freedom, less control. This leads to children learning from the consequences of their choices, becoming responsible and developing into independent adults. This type of parenting is viewed sometimes as neglectful in the United States, which is actually an incorrect viewpoint, since neglectful parents are cold and unresponsive, and free-range parents are actually warm and responsive, but favor autonomy, independence and power of choice for their children. (27)

Parenting characteristics

Responsiveness and Demandingness

The most famous researchers who defined parenting styles, Baumrind, Maccoby, and Martin studied parenting through the basic dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness (2,5,7,28). To clarify these terms, responsiveness refers to a parenting practice that involves a combination of parental warmth and support. Demandingness, which is more complex refers to parental practices such as behavioral control, demands, expectations, and discipline.

The parenting literature identifies four main dimensions of parenting that influence emotional intelligence of children: parental responsiveness, parental positive demandingness, parental negative demandingness, and parental emotion-related coaching.

Findings

Positive parental responsiveness involves acceptance of the children's feelings and needs; being sensitive and reacting in a supportive way to their emotions and state of mind. It is associated with positive outcomes in children's development, as shown by multiple studies (2). Research evaluated the influence of parental practices on important aspects such as prosocial behavior (11) and life satisfaction (41). Academic functioning (45) and alcohol consumption (29) were studied as well. All studies concluded that positive responsiveness which includes parental practices like autonomy granting and inductive discipline correlated with the positive outcomes mentioned above. Autonomy granting refers to encouraging decision-making and inductive discipline involves reasoning and discussion (children know the rules, expectations and values of the family, and the consequences of their behaviors).

Negative parental demandingness such as inconsistent, punitive, and harsh discipline correlated with opposite, negative outcomes, such as personality disorders, anxiety, reduced emotional well-being, and increased externalizing behaviors (2, 10, 11, 18, 22, 26, 42, 45). Using punitive discipline was connected to children's lower level of emotional understanding (34) and to lower emotional regulation (30, 41).

Parental Emotional Training is related to rewarding emotionally intelligent behavior. Research discovered that accepting children's displays of emotions and helping them understand their feelings, actually makes them behave in positive and efficient ways (2). These parental practices were also correlated with higher ability to regulate emotions, which is a useful and positive trait. An important study, conducted by Perman et al. found that minimization, dismissal and punitive parental reactions to children's display of emotions were negatively related to children's emotional overall knowledge (35). In addition, Denham and colleagues confirmed by conducting extensive research that parents who are emotionally expressive and responsive model this behavior, and therefore their children understand their own emotions better. Also, these children developed higher emotional competence as their parents encouraged them to discuss emotional events with them, and to express their emotions instead of repress them (2, 12,13). Parental psychological control is related to negative outcomes like emotional eating (44) and even depression and delinquency (4).

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional Intelligence is a group of interconnected skills (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills) that affects many domains of life, including parenting. More studies are needed to address the relation between parenting styles and emotional intelligence.

A relevant study involving 90 teenagers found that their ability to manage their own emotions and

impulses, the way they behave in their interpersonal relationships, and express their emotions were all correlated to specific parenting styles adopted by their parents and the relations between the family members. (32). In this study, the 2 tests used to evaluate emotional intelligence were the Emotional Intelligence Scale – EIS (39) and Battery of Emotional Intelligence Profile – BTPIE. The parents completed the Questionnaire for the parental styles– CSP. The results demonstrated that the authoritative and permissive parenting were correlated with the highest level of development of emotional intelligence. Another study involving preschool age children found that the authoritarian parenting style had a negative effect on children’s emotional intelligence (14). For kindergarten age children, the authoritative parenting style was found to have the best influence on the emotional intelligence (1). For adolescents, results indicated that emotional intelligence is negatively correlated with permissive parenting. In addition, this parenting style had an adverse influence on the development of emotional intelligence by reducing the number of challenging emotional experiences in teens and the extent to which parents facilitate their children’s emotional growth (47).

Depression

Expanding to other child outcomes besides emotional intelligence, findings indicate that certain parenting styles are related to mental health problems. According to Mental Health America, depression is increasing at an alarming rate in teenagers (one in five teens suffers from clinical depression, according to recent surveys). Also, as moodiness is associated with adolescence, and teenagers often have a difficult time expressing and understanding their feelings well, depression is not easy to diagnose in this age group, and parents might miss or disregard the signs of this illness.

A significant national study examined depression and authoritarian parenting among youth ages 12 to 17 years old. In addition, a secondary data analysis of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health was performed, and included in this 2016 study (21). Nationwide, 80.6% of youth participants reported having five or more depressive symptoms, specifically, in those whose parents practiced an authoritarian parenting style at home.

Academic Achievement and Career Readiness

Studies involving middle school and teenagers confirmed that close parental monitoring of school involvement and parenting style affect educational achievement.

Data collected on a large sample of 9-year-old children who took part in the *Growing Up in Ireland* study found that authoritative parenting style was associated with higher scores on measures of reading and math tests in comparison to neglectful or uninvolved style (31). A review study of 39 relevant, recent studies on adolescents found that academic achievement is affected by parental involvement, monitoring and education level, besides the specific parenting style. (15) Parents with higher education level tend to use the authoritative type of parenting style. This study also found that even though this style of parenting relates to best academic achievement in general, students of Asian descent perform better under authoritarian parenting, as compared to the US and West European countries, where authoritative parenting is prevalent and proven to be more successful.

A study surveying 229 undergraduates in two universities in Hong Kong, China found that career unreadiness, and career indecision, including student's anxiety were related to authoritarian parenting practices during childhood (10)

Table 1. Parenting Styles and Associated Outcomes

Parenting Style - characteristics		Child Outcomes
<i>Authoritative</i>	Warm and responsive Supportive Clear rules High expectations Value independence	Higher academic achievement Better social skills Improved self-esteem Less anxiety, depression – mental health problems Reduced delinquency
<i>Authoritarian</i>	Cold and unresponsive Controlling Strict rules High expectations Expect total obedience	Lower academic achievement Poor social skills Reduced self-esteem More anxiety, depression – mental health problems Drug/alcohol abuse and delinquency
<i>Permissive</i>	Warm and responsive Indulgent Few rules Few demands Little control	Lack of focus and self-discipline Poor academic achievement Egocentric Poor social skills Impulsive behavior, anxiety, depression, social isolation Difficulty in sustaining relationships
<i>Neglectful</i>	Cold and unresponsive Indifferent No rules Few demands Uninvolved	Lowest academic achievement Reduced self-esteem and even suicide Drug/alcohol abuse Delinquency Difficulty forming and maintaining relationships

Methods

To reach the aim of gathering pertinent information related to our topic, we researched databases like Academia.edu, SAGE journals, Taylor & Francis Journals, ResearchGate, Science Direct, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Keywords used in the online search were: “parenting styles”, “emotional intelligence”, “developmental outcome”, “influence”, “effect”. Findings were prioritized based on relevance and the date articles were published. To confirm the validity of the studies we included, we ensured that all articles reviewed were published in trustworthy journals and publications. We reviewed the findings of 46 articles that analyzed the relationship between parenting styles and child development.

Conclusion

After reviewing multiple studies across the world, we conclude that the authoritative parenting style was associated with the best child outcomes, including higher emotional regulation and lower behavioral problems, compared to any other type of parenting, regardless of country and age (a study in Jordan on over 100 children of kindergarten age (1); a study of three hundred and eighty-seven parents of children ages 2 to 10 conducted in Australia (an individualist culture) and Indonesia (a collectivist culture) (16). A review study found that despite hypothesized cultural differences between the West and India, the effect of parenting styles on children appears to be similar across these cultures (38). Different important outcomes were evaluated and measured, all showing best scores of children of authoritative parents in regards to school achievement (9), social and school competence (41), resilience (23), adjustment (41), attachment (19), and prosocial behavior (17). According to Baumrind (7), adolescents are most likely to be optimally competent when parents are both demanding and responsive, which corresponds to authoritative parenting.

Limitations

The results of these studies demonstrate the link between parenting styles and children's outcomes and behavior, proving correlation, but not definite causation. Does children temperament influence parents' response and behavior? If the children behave well and are obedient, does that cause their parents to be warmer and more responsive, like the recommended authoritative parenting style is? Is authoritative parenting especially important for certain developmental parenting periods, such as adolescence? Does authoritative parenting vary cross-culturally? Additional research and studies involving more cultures and countries, a larger number of participants, children temperament and other factors such as parents' education level and their upbringing are recommended.

Future directions

There are certain policy implications that result from this type of reviews. Family is the basic learning environment for children, and has an undeniable, important effect on their overall development.

Clear evidence supports authoritative parenting style and the two dimensions of parenting (warmth and responsiveness) as the most effective strategies in raising children to become competent, successful, and happy adults. Therefore, parents must consider using specific ways, in accordance with the authoritative style, so they can promote healthy development and help their children become socially, academically, and ethically successful. There are many books available and valuable research on child development. Significant emphasis is placed on this topic, much more than on parenting styles.

It would be helpful to offer parents resources that are easy to access and understand, such as Very well Family, facilitate their learning of possible ways on how to become more authoritative, and the reasons why this is important. Integration of research, practice, and policy that best supports parents and children could be implemented.

Emphasizing the role of the parents and teaching positive parenting practice and authoritative parenting style may help increase success of prevention programs, reduce mental health issues during adulthood, and create a society of more responsible, happy and successful people.

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