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## **A Study on Parenting Styles, Self-Esteem and Psychological Distress among Young Adults**

*Ojas Shukla*

Student, Bachelor of Arts: Psychology Honours, MCM DAV College for Women, Patiala, India

Email ID: [shuklaojas2000@gmail.com](mailto:shuklaojas2000@gmail.com)

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### **ABSTRACT**

When a parent creates an environment for the child in which s/he can embrace independence, express wholly, be heard, be loved, learn boundaries and limits, and respect the expectations of the parent, the child blossoms into a self-reliant, emotionally regulated, and socially sound adult. Alternatively, if a child is nurtured in a controlled, harsh, unsupportive, emotionally suppressive environment, s/he tends to feel aggressive, unheard, tense, and may develop social and organizational difficulties en route growing up. Henceforth, parenting has an immense influence on the self-esteem and anguish of the child. This study aimed to investigate the impact of numerous parenting styles on the self-esteem and psychological distress levels of young adults. The results indicated that the Authoritative Style of Parenting is positively correlated to Self-Esteem and inversely related to Psychological Distress levels in young adults. On the contrary, there was a negative correlation between Authoritarian Parenting and Self-Esteem, whereas, a positive association between the former and Psychological Distress levels in the sample. There was a decent correlation between the Permissive Style, and Self-Esteem and Distress levels, both being negative and positive respectively. Consequently, the parent must acknowledge and address their child's grief and lack of self-regard; and must seek professional mental health care services; and/or modify their parenting practices. This can help both the parent and the child to form a healthier and more interactive environment for the two to flourish as better individuals.

**Keywords:** Parenting styles, Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, Distress, Self-esteem, Young Adults

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### **Introduction**

“Good parents hardly parent. They let their kids learn, fail, and grow without interference.” - Trevor Carss. The word "parenting" is derived from the Old French word "parenter" which means "to be a parent". Over time, the meaning of the word "parent" has expanded to encompass the roles and responsibilities of both fathers and mothers, as well as guardians and caregivers. Initially, parenting was examined by researchers across several dimensions, such as emotional involvement, democracy, restrictiveness, control, dominance, acceptance, and levels of responsiveness. During the 1960s, Diana Baumrind, a developmental psychologist, put forth a categorization of three parenting approaches known as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (or indulgent). Based on the research conducted by Diana Baumrind along with Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin from Stanford University, the field of child psychology currently recognizes four primary parenting styles: permissive, authoritative, neglectful, and authoritarian. The authoritative style was defined as a desirable equilibrium between control and autonomy. With the inclusion of a fourth classification for neglectful or indifferent parents, this typology became widely recognized as the primary framework for categorizing parenting styles. Later studies on parenting styles focused more on the dimensions of parenting and emphasized the context-specific nature of parental decision-making.

In addition to meeting their child's basic needs, parents are responsible for instilling values, setting boundaries, and teaching life skills. Effective parenting involves providing a safe and supportive environment for children, meeting their basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing, fostering their emotional well-being, and promoting their physical and cognitive development. This relationship, therefore, is considered one of the most significant and influential relationships in an individual's life because it can highly influence how the child expresses, behaves, thinks, and functions in an average setting all the while s/he matures into an adult. Between Involvement and Interference is a thin line that every parent must respect for their child to perform efficiently.

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### **Parenting Styles**

Parenting refers to raising and nurturing a child from infancy to adulthood. It involves providing physical, emotional, and social care, as well as guidance and support, to help children develop into healthy and well-adjusted adults.

According to Darling and Steinberg (1993), parenting style is defined as “a constellation of parents’ attitudes and behaviours toward children and an emotional climate in which the parents’ behaviours are expressed”.

“Parenting refers to the rearing of a child or children, in particular, love and guidance given by a parent” (Virasiri, Yunibhand, & Chaiyawat, 2011, p.

1110)

Parenting style refers to how parents raise their children, including their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. The following are some common parenting styles:

- **Authoritarian:** This parenting style is characterized by strict rules, high expectations, and little flexibility. Children are expected to follow the rules without question, and punishment is used to enforce compliance.
- **Authoritative:** This parenting style is characterized by clear rules and expectations, but also warmth and support. Children are encouraged to be independent and to express their opinions, and discipline is used as a teaching tool rather than as punishment.
- **Permissive:** This parenting style is characterized by few rules and much freedom. Parents who use this style may be very responsive to their children's needs and desires but struggle to set boundaries and enforce discipline.
- **Uninvolved:** This parenting style is characterized by a lack of emotional involvement and little or no discipline. Parents who use this style may be neglectful or indifferent to their children's needs and may prioritize their own needs above those of their children.

Parenting styles provide a framework for understanding the level of interaction between parents and children in various aspects, including discipline, support, warmth, and caring (Coplan, Hastings, Lagace-Seguin, & Moulton, 2002).

A study conducted by Zakeri and Karimpur (2011) analysed how parenting styles affect self-esteem in 546 Shiraz University students using Steinberg's Parenting Styles Scale and Coopersmith's self-esteem scale. Results showed that the "acceptance-involvement" and "psychological autonomy-granting" styles positively predicted self-esteem. Girls scored higher than boys in the "behavioural strictness-supervision" style.

In a study by Chiew (2011), the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem in 100 Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) students was investigated, and results showed that there was a significant correlation between parenting styles and self-esteem. Specifically, authoritative parenting was associated with higher self-esteem compared to authoritarian parenting.

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## Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the way individuals feel about themselves and their abilities. It is the subjective evaluation of one's worth and can be influenced by various factors such as personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural norms.

People with high self-esteem tend to have a positive self-image, believe in their abilities, and are confident in themselves. On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem tend to have a negative self-image, doubt their abilities, and may feel insecure.

Self-esteem can be fragile and can fluctuate depending on various circumstances. Therefore, it is important to practice self-care and self-compassion and surround oneself with positive and supportive people to maintain healthy self-esteem. Seeking therapy or counselling can also be beneficial in building and maintaining a positive self-image.

According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is "ones positive or negative attitude toward oneself and one's evaluation of one's thoughts and feelings overall concerning oneself".

Self-esteem is regarded as "a personal psychological characteristic relating to self-judgment based on one's values about humans" (Alesi et al., 2012).

In a cross-sectional descriptive study conducted in Zahedan City during 2013-2014 by Moghaddam, Validad, and Rakhshani (2017), the objective of the study was to examine the correlation between parenting styles and self-esteem among primary school children. The study indicated that children with authoritative parenting styles exhibited significantly higher levels of self-esteem, than the ones falling under other parenting styles.

A study on Spanish adolescents examined the correlation between parenting styles and self-esteem outcomes. Indulgent parenting resulted in similar or better outcomes than authoritative parenting, with higher self-esteem scores. Authoritarian parenting had the lowest outcomes. Adolescents from authoritarian and neglectful households assigned the lowest priority to self-transcendence and conservation values. (Martínez & García, 2007).

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## Psychological Distress

Distress refers to a state of physical, mental, or emotional suffering caused by adverse circumstances or events. It can manifest in different ways, such as feelings of anxiety, sadness, hopelessness, and despair, or physical symptoms like headaches, fatigue, and sleep problems.

Distress can be caused by various factors, including traumatic experiences, chronic stress, financial difficulties, relationship problems, health problems, and environmental factors.

Psychological distress is defined by Lerutla (2000) as "an emotional state in which the individual feels the necessity of coping with disturbing, damaging or frustrating situations"

Psychological distress is a lack of enthusiasm, problems with sleep (trouble falling asleep or staying asleep), feeling downhearted or blue, feeling

hopeless about the future, feeling emotionally bored (for example, crying easily or feeling like crying), or losing interest in things (Decker, 1997; Burnette & Mui 1997).

A study explored the links between parenting style and emotional distress (depression/anxiety) in Chinese college students. Parental rejection/overprotection was mildly linked to distress and negatively linked to Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean) thinking, while warmth was positively linked to all three variables. Zhongyong thinking partially mediated the associations between rejection/warmth and distress. (Hou et al., 2020).

A study conducted by Solataus-Simula et al. (2002) analyzed mother-father-child triads to explore how parenting quality differed based on children's responses and whether parents/children perceived parenting and child distress differently. Children in the Active Empathy and Indifference groups received better parenting. The Emotional Overinvolvement group had discrepancies in perceptions of child distress and parenting, while the Avoidance group had an agreement on poor parenting and severe child distress.

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## Purpose

The purpose is to study parenting styles and their impact on a child's self-esteem and distress levels.

## Hypothesis

- There will be a negative correlation between the Authoritative style of Parenting and Psychological Distress levels.
- There will be a positive correlation between the Authoritative style of Parenting and Self-Esteem.
- There will be a positive correlation between the Authoritarian style of Parenting and Psychological Distress levels.
- There will be a negative correlation between the Authoritarian style of Parenting and Self-Esteem.

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## Method

### Sample

A total of 60 individuals, from Punjab, participated in the study. The age group of the subjects ranged from 20 to 26 years of age.

### Measures

**Perceived Parenting Styles Scale (PPSS):** Divya and Manikandan (2013) devised the Perceived Parenting Scale to gauge how children perceive their parents' conduct. This scale assesses the perceived parenting style of individuals across three dimensions: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. It comprises 30 items, with participants providing responses on a five-point Likert scale. There are Five (5) possible answers provided for each question viz: 1) Never, 2) Rarely, 3) Sometimes, 4) Often, and 5) Always. All the items on the scale are worded positively and scored 5 to 1. Each subscale is summed up respectively.

**Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale:** This scale, developed by Dr. Morris Rosenberg in 1965, is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be unidimensional. Responses to all statements are measured on a 4-point Likert scale that spans from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Specifically, items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are scored in reverse. A value of 1 is assigned to "Strongly Disagree," 2 to "Disagree," 3 to "Agree," and 4 to "Strongly Agree."

**Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale - 21 items (DASS-21):** The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale - 21 Items (DASS-21) is the shortened version of the DASS developed by Lovibond and Lovibond in 1995. The DASS-21 is a collection of three self-report scales intended to assess the emotional conditions of depression, anxiety, and stress. Each of the three scales in the DASS-21 consists of 7 items, organized into subscales that address related themes. The depression scale measures various aspects of depression, including dysphoria, hopelessness, self-deprecation, etc. The anxiety scale measures autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, and situational anxiety. The stress scale assesses difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, agitation, irritable over-reactive, and impatient. The rating scale of the questionnaire follows the following scoring: 0: Did not apply to me at all, 1: Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time, 2: Applied to me to a considerable degree or a good part of the time, and 3: Applied to me very much or most of the time. The scores for depression, anxiety, and stress are obtained by adding up the relevant item scores, and then these scores are summed up to calculate the overall distress level. To determine the final score on the DASS-21, the scores need to be multiplied by 2.

### Procedure

The data was collected electronically via Google Forms. The respondents were humbly invited to fill out the form; and briefed about the aim behind the research's data collection. The respondents were instructed to answer each question and summarize the conditions (if any) before answering any question. They were reassured that their anonymity and confidentiality would be established and the data collected would not be used for other purposes than this research. Finally, the respondents were thanked for their respective participation.

### Results of Data Analysis

The responses of participants were analysed using linear correlation to see the impact of Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive styles on the Self-Esteem and Distress levels of young adults. Table 1 shows the Mean and Standard Deviation of the data sample. Table 2 shows the correlation between the three styles of Parenting Styles, Self-Esteem, and Distress levels of young adults.

**Table 1**

*Shows N, Mean and Standard Deviation data of the sample.*

	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Self-Esteem	Distress
<b>N</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Mean</b>	<b>37.8</b>	<b>24.7</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>48.3</b>
<b>Standard Deviat</b>	<b>8.06</b>	<b>8.00</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>4.63</b>	<b>26.9</b>

**Table 2**

*Shows the correlation between the three Parenting Styles, Self-Esteem, and Distress levels of the young adults*

	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Self-Esteem	Distress
<b>Authoritative</b>	—				
<b>Authoritarian</b>	<b>-0.341 **</b>	—			
<b>Permissive</b>	<b>-0.058</b>	<b>0.608 ***</b>	—		
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	<b>0.437 ***</b>	<b>-0.502 ***</b>	<b>-0.396 **</b>	—	
<b>Distress</b>	<b>-0.253</b>	<b>0.553 ***</b>	<b>0.328 *</b>	<b>-0.596 ***</b>	—

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

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## Discussion

This study aimed at evaluating the impact of various Parenting Styles on Self-Esteem and psychological Distress levels in young adults. This research hypothesized that Self-Esteem will be positively and negatively correlated to Authoritative and Authoritarian styles, respectively. A total of 60 young adults from Punjab participated in the study and their responses were analysed.

The results found that there is a significant positive correlation between the Authoritative Style of Parenting and Self-Esteem ( $r=0.437$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and a negative correlation between the Authoritative Parenting style and Distress levels of young adults ( $r=-0.253$ ) however which wasn't significant. Furthermore, we observed a highly significant negative correlation between the Authoritarian Style of Parenting and Self-Esteem ( $r=-0.502$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and a significant positive correlation between Authoritarian Parenting and Distress levels in the sample ( $r=0.553$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In addition to this, we also detected a decent negative correlation between the Permissive Style of Parenting and Self-Esteem ( $r=-0.396$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and a positive correlation between the former and Distress levels in the subjects. Consequently, the hypothesis that there will be a positive correlation between Authoritative Parenting and Self-Esteem and a negative correlation between Authoritative Parenting Style and Distress is accepted. Meanwhile, the significance of the negative correlation between the Authoritarian Style of Parenting and Self-Esteem and a positive correlation between Authoritarian Parenting and Distress levels in the sample accepts the hypothesis.

In a study by Hong, Long, and Rehman (2015), the research revealed a noteworthy correlation between parenting styles and self-esteem levels among university students. Specifically, both authoritative and permissive parenting styles were positively associated with self-esteem, whereas the authoritarian parenting style exhibited a negative association with students' self-esteem. According to a study by Ebrahimi et al., (2017), the study findings showed a substantial inverse correlation between authoritative parenting style and students' depression, as well as a comparable trend between students' depression and secure or ambivalent attachment styles of their parents. In contrast, permissive and authoritarian parenting styles exhibited a positive and significant correlation with students' depression.

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## Conclusion

The research study dilates upon the impact of diverse parenting styles viz. Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive Parenting Styles on young adults' Self-esteem and Distress Levels. A significant positive correlation exists between the Authoritative Style of Parenting and Self-Esteem and an inverse relationship between the former and the distress levels in the sample. Per contra, the results showed a negative association between the Authoritarian Style of Parenting and Self-Esteem levels, as well as a positive correlation between Authoritarian Parenting Style and Distress levels in young adults. Concerning the Permissive Style of Parenting, there was a decent positive correlation and negative correlation between the prior and Distress and Self-Esteem respectively. The Authoritarian Style of Parenting is characterized by a heavier focus on obedience, discipline, and control rather than nurturing and taking care of the child; this leads to the child being interpersonally inept, intrapersonal suppressed, and may as an adult growing up to be hostile and aggressive. On the other hand, The Authoritative Parenting Style is bodied by intense warmth and love for the child with a fair amount of discipline and expectations which do not vanquish the child's independence and expression of themselves. Children nurtured under this style of parenting mature into socially efficient, self-reliant, and academically successful individuals with lesser-known Depression, Anxiety, and Stress rates than those children who evolved under the Authoritarian and Permissive Style of Parenting. Parents may use a combination of different styles depending on the situation and their child's needs. Additionally, different children may respond differently to the same parenting style, so parents need to be flexible and responsive to their children. If a parent observes their progeny experiencing distress or difficulties functioning in a normal setting, they need to reflect on the type of parenting they practice and seek support from trusted friends or family members, healthcare professionals, or mental health services. Various resources are available to help people cope with distress, including therapy, support groups, self-help books, and meditation and relaxation techniques. Parenting can be a challenging and rewarding experience that requires ongoing effort, patience, and flexibility. Good parenting practices can have a positive impact on children's well-being and can help them develop into healthy, resilient, and outstanding adults.

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