



The Relationship between Parental Authority and Emotional Regulation among Indian Adults Across Different Age Groups

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Abstract: Parenting styles have been found to have a long-lasting effect on child development and their personalities in adult life. Although authoritative style is considered to be the best, there is no reason to claim that authoritarian and permissive styles always lead to emotional dysregulation in individuals. This study was based on data from 112 Indian urban adults of different age groups, consolidated through convenience sampling. The findings did not show any significant relationship between parental authority and emotional regulation. However, the results indicated a steady improvement in emotional regulation with increase in age. This is in concurrence with the fact that personality and emotional regulation skills do not depend only on parenting styles, rather they are influenced by many factors like genetics, family atmosphere, financial status, marital relationship of the parents, cultural norms etc. Also, as individuals age, they tend to acquire the skills that help them regulate their emotions. They learn from their experiences and life itself teaches them to fall and rise again.

Keywords: *Parental Authority, Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive Styles, Emotional Regulation, Indian Adults*

1. Introduction

Childhood and parenthood are the two most beautiful phases in an individual's lifetime. Children look up to their parents and depend on them for their physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth. They observe and learn from their parents and make memories depending on the support and warmth provided at home. Their personalities also depend a lot on the

upbringing provided by the parents. These children, after becoming adults, may or may not follow the footsteps of their parents. This is influenced to a great extent by the experiences offered to them by the parents. Parents on the other hand, enter into parenthood with a lot of expectations and excitement. They always intend to be the best parents and raise the best children, but it does not always happen that way. Most of the parents enter into a world of trial and error as far as parenting is concerned; they themselves are ignorant and fail at times to understand the emotional requirements involved in a parent-child relationship. When they succeed, they present to the world a set of individuals who are emotionally strong and who are capable of contributing to the society in a constructive way. In contrast, when they fail, what the world gets is a group of mentally weak or unstable people who do not have much to offer to the society. Studies have found that different parenting styles can have a range of effects on children. Academic achievement and motivation, social and adult relationships, emotional well-being etc. are some areas that might get effected.

Parental Authority

In the 1960s, Diana Baumrind, an American clinical and developmental psychologist presented to the world her concept of three different parenting styles based on the authority exercised by parents on their children. Authoritative parenting is characterized by high control and high warmth, which also means high demandingness with huge responsiveness. These parents are firm and assertive but allow their children to make mistakes, learn from them and make their own decisions. They guide and support their children without being rigid. High control and low warmth are the hallmarks of authoritarian parenting style. They set rigid boundaries and expect the children to follow their orders without any questions asked. Most of the abusive parents fall in this category, though Baumrind emphasizes that not all authoritarian parents are abusive. Permissive parenting style exhibits low control and high warmth. They seldom set rules and regulations and are overly responsive to their children's demands. These parents have a high chance of raising 'spoiled brats'(Baumrind,1967). Neglectful parenting is all about low control and low warmth. Parents who follow this style set no boundaries and provide little emotional support or guidance. Their children are likely to face low self-esteem and social difficulties later on in life (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Individuals raised by authoritative parents tend to exhibit a positive outlook; they have lower levels of emotional suppression and better emotional awareness (Teresa, 2015). It is to be

noted that parenting style is not the only factor that determines the personality of a child. Other than genetics, the financial status of the family, home environment, mental and physical health of the parents and children, marital relationship of the parents, cultural norms etc. also have a huge impact on how and what a child grows up to be (Burgoyne, Bridget & Grant-Marsney, Holly, 2024). For example, authoritarian parenting is considered effective by Asian parents to inculcate discipline in their children. Parents make decisions regarding their children's friends, academic interests, food habits etc. Most of these children turn out to be successful and possess good mental health because they value the role of culture in this kind of upbringing, but the same may not work in Western countries.

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the ability to regulate one's emotions. It is a skill that can be learned with time and age, rather than a personality trait. It is about training the brain and body to respond to emotional experiences in a way that is aligned with the expectations of the immediate environment. This skill helps to avoid unpleasant altercations and disappointments. It also enables one to recognize own emotions and use techniques to regulate them to suit the situation. For example, counting from one to ten to reduce panic, exercising to improve mood, listening to music when experiencing stress, yoga and meditation etc. are some ways adopted by individuals who have good emotional regulation abilities. Those who are unable to do this are said to be suffering from emotional dysregulation; they experience unpredictable and violent outbursts of anger, sadness and panic. They fail to reason logically and process emotions and may try to avoid emotions, shut them down or even turn to substance abuse.

Studies on emerging adults have shown association between authoritative parenting and lower delinquency (Rodriguez et al, 2016). An affectionate parenting style is crucial during childhood since difficulties in emotional regulation can lead to mental health disorders. Studies have tried to find the effect of parental care and parental over protection on emotional regulation capabilities and parental care seems to be more important. As far as adults' perceptions of their childhood relationships with parents are concerned, perceived paternal care has a strong relationship with emotional regulation difficulties, whereas perceived maternal care is linked to lower use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies and lower deficits in emotional awareness (Tani et al, 2018).

1.1 Current Study

Many studies have found that parental authority or parenting style has an influence on the personality development of the children. Authoritative style is generally considered as the best, though we cannot say that the other styles of parenting lead to distorted personalities in children. This is because there are many other factors that influence personality development. There is no doubt that childhood experiences play a crucial role in emotion regulation capabilities in children at a later stage. Children raised by authoritarian or permissive parents may try to follow the footsteps of their parents if they grow up to be emotionally strong individuals. At the same time, there is also a possibility that they decide to be authoritative with their children once they become parents. Emotional regulation skills are generally found to be improving with age. Adolescents and young adults usually tend to criticize the parenting styles of their parents. It is only when they become parents that they face the realities and form their own ways to deal with their children. Keeping these points in mind, the current study was conducted to understand the association between parental authority and emotional regulation in Indian adults across different age groups. It also attempts to find an association between emotional regulation and age. This study was based on the following non-directional hypotheses:

H1: There will be a significant association between authoritative parenting style and emotional regulation in Indian adults across different age groups.

H2: There will be a significant association between authoritarian parenting style and emotional regulation in Indian adults across different age groups.

H3: There will be a significant association between permissive parenting style and emotional regulation in Indian adults across different age groups.

H4: There will be a significant association between age and emotional regulation in Indian adults.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

Convenience sampling was adopted by sharing the google form link on WhatsApp and social media platforms. Consent and confidentiality were explained, and respondents were also informed that they were free to withdraw at any point of time. 112 responses were received from

49 males and 63 females. There were four age groups, 18-25, 26-35, 36-45 and 46-55 which had 40, 18, 16 and 38 respondents respectively with mean age 35.5 and standard deviation 12.46.

2.2 Instruments used

Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS): A 36-item scale to assess clinically relevant difficulties in emotion regulation. It was originally validated in an adult population (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). The possible score range was 36 to 180. A five-point Likert Scale was used with score 1 for Almost Never to 5 for Almost Always. Reverse scoring had to be done for 11 items. A lower score indicates better emotional regulation, and a higher score shows difficulties in emotional regulation.

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ): A 30-item scale to assess parenting styles namely authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. The total possible score range was 30 to 150. Each parenting style had ten items with a possible score of 10 to 50. A five-point Likert Scale was used with score 1 for Strongly Disagree to 5 for Strongly Agree. (Buri,1991)

3. Analysis

The responses were scored as per the DERS and PAQ scoring on MS Excel. Each respondent got six scores for the six subscales in DERS, but only the total score was used in this study. Each respondent got three scores in PAQ, for authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. The PAQ mean was 92.71 with SD 8.24 and DERS mean was 80.53 with SD 20.72.

Table1: Descriptive statistics based on parenting style

Parenting Style	N	PAQ mean	SD	DERS mean	SD
Authoritative	64	94.91	7.49	77	18.28
Authoritarian	36	89.75	9.06	86.81	25.22
Permissive	12	89.83	6.12	80.5	13.85

Table 2: Correlation result for parenting styles and DERS

Parenting Style	N	r (PAQ-DERS)	p value	Significant (p< 0.05)
Authoritative	64	0.185	0.143	No
Authoritarian	36	0.115	0.506	No

Permissive	12	0.085	0.793	No
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There was no significant correlation between emotional regulation and any of the parenting styles. A Pearson product-moment correlation indicated a weak, non-significant positive correlation between parental authority and emotional regulation. $r(110) = .08, p = .43$. Also, one-way ANOVA indicated that emotional regulation scores did not differ significantly across parenting styles, $F(2, 109) = 2.66, p = .075$.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics based on age group

Age group	N	DERS mean	SD	PAQ mean	SD
18-25	40	91.30	21.15	92.08	8.17
26-35	18	77.67	16.87	92.22	8.50
36-45	16	77.88	22.62	94.63	7.16
46-55	38	71.66	16.27	92.79	8.80

Table 4: Correlation result for age and DERS

	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Age and DERS (Pearson)	-.39	< .001
Age and DERS (Spearman)	-.40	< .001

The difference in emotional regulation across age groups was evident from the data. A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in emotional regulation across age groups, $F(3, 108) = 7.15, p < .001$. Pearson and Spearman correlations were also negative, which means DERS scores decreased with increasing age and that indicated better emotional regulation in older people.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between parental authority and emotional regulation among Indian adults across different age groups. The findings revealed that there was no significant overall relationship between parental authority (PAQ scores) and emotional regulation difficulties (DERS scores). Although a weak positive correlation was observed, it was not statistically significant. Specific parenting styles also did not have any significant relationship with emotional regulation. This suggests that parental authority, as perceived by participants, may not directly predict emotional regulation difficulties in adulthood.

Emotional regulation is likely influenced by multiple interacting factors such as personality traits, life experiences, social environment, and coping strategies rather than parenting style alone. No significant gender differences were found in the relationship between parental authority and emotional regulation. Both males and females showed weak and non-significant correlations. This indicates that the impact of parental authority on emotional regulation may operate similarly across genders in this sample. It suggests that gender alone does not moderate the relationship between parenting style and emotional regulation difficulties.

Interestingly, significant differences were found in emotional regulation across age groups. Participants aged 18–25 reported significantly higher DERS scores which indicate more emotional regulation difficulties compared to those aged 46–55. This can be easily understood by the fact that young adults go through a lot of emotional turmoil; especially during the transitional phase when they are leaving school and joining college or finishing college and starting a new job. Higher levels of parental indulgence led to greater emotional and behavioral problems in college students (Ming Cui et al, 2019). This explains the ‘rebellious phase’ that both parents and children face. Children are unable to understand the parents’ perspective and parents tend to forget how they behaved when they themselves were children. The finding also aligns with developmental theories suggesting that emotional regulation improves with age and life experience. Older adults may develop more adaptive coping strategies, emotional awareness and regulation skills over time. They are able to understand their parents better at a later stage when they become parents. Experiences and challenges in life teach them resilience. The situation is different with individuals who grew up in troublesome households or were raised by parents who themselves had mental health issues. Even in situations where the parents and children seem to be leading a happy life, there could be underlying issues which the outside world fail to observe. At times, children do not understand unhealthy parenting styles, they consider it normal and do not discuss with anyone. Exposure to authoritarian parenting and lower perceived social support are linked to greater use of expressive suppression. On the other hand, exposure to authoritative parenting and lower levels of social anxiety are associated with increased use of cognitive reappraisal (Humna Azhar et al, 2019).

The absence of significant differences in PAQ across age groups suggests that perceptions of parental authority remain relatively stable across generations, but emotional regulation capacities change as individuals grow and attain maturity.

This study has its limitations as given below:

Convenience sampling has given rise to a sample with unequal groups as far as parenting styles are concerned. More than half of the respondents consider their parents as authoritative and only 12 came under the permissive category.

Keeping in mind the fact that some of the respondents could be from single parent backgrounds, they were asked to give their responses based on the parenting style of any one parent.

Self-reporting usually leads to bias. Since the respondents were assessing the parenting styles of their parents retrospectively, it could have led to recall bias considering the varied age groups. Young adults might consider their parents as authoritarian while their parents might not agree. Older people would have different opinions about parenting, now that they themselves are parents.

Cultural and socio-economic variables were not controlled in this study. The respondents belong to various parts of the country and come from different financial and social backgrounds, so there could be a lot of differences in the cultural outlook and upbringing.

5. Conclusion

This study was undertaken to find a relationship between parental authority and emotional regulation in Indian adults across different age groups. The data was also used to study the relationship between age and emotional regulation in Indian adults. The findings are as follows:

H1: There will be a significant association between authoritative parenting style and emotional regulation in Indian adults across different age groups.

The findings did not support this hypothesis. Although descriptive statistics showed that participants exposed to authoritative parenting style reported lower emotional regulation difficulties compared to other parenting styles, the association between authoritative parenting and emotional regulation was not statistically significant in this sample. Furthermore, age-wise correlation analysis indicated that the relationship between parental authority and emotional regulation was significant only in the 46–55 age group, but not same across all age groups. Therefore, the hypothesis predicting a significant association across age groups was rejected.

H2: There will be a significant association between authoritarian parenting style and emotional regulation in Indian adults across different age groups.

The analysis did not reveal a statistically significant association between authoritarian parenting style and emotional regulation in Indian adults. Although descriptive findings indicated that participants who reported authoritarian parenting had comparatively higher emotional regulation difficulties (higher DERS scores), the correlation between PAQ and DERS within the authoritarian group was weak and non-significant. Additionally, ANOVA results showed no significant differences in emotional regulation across parenting styles overall. Therefore, the hypothesis proposing a significant association between authoritarian parenting style and emotional regulation is not supported in the present study. This suggests that while authoritarian parenting may descriptively relate to higher emotional difficulties, it does not significantly predict emotional regulation outcomes in adulthood within this sample.

H3: There will be a significant association between permissive parenting style and emotional regulation in Indian adults across different age groups.

The findings did not support a significant association between permissive parenting style and emotional regulation. Correlation analysis within the permissive group showed a very weak and non-significant relationship between parental authority and emotional regulation. Furthermore, emotional regulation scores did not significantly differ between permissive and other parenting styles. It is important to note that the permissive group had a smaller sample size, which was not enough to produce results with statistical significance. Thus, the hypothesis proposing a significant association between permissive parenting style and emotional regulation was not supported in this study.

H4: There will be a significant association between age and emotional regulation in Indian adults.

The findings supported this hypothesis. A statistically significant moderate negative correlation was found between age and emotional regulation difficulties. As age increased, DERS scores decreased, indicating better emotional regulation among older adults. Additionally, ANOVA results showed significant differences in emotional regulation across age groups, with the 18–25 group reporting significantly higher difficulties compared to the 46–55 group. Thus, the findings of the study supported this hypothesis.

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