



Impact of Parental Comparison Culture on Adolescents Mental Health and Self Worth in Urban Indian Families

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Abstract: Parental comparison culture, which is primarily motivated by academic rivalry and collectivist ideals, is quite common in urban Indian homes. It is defined as comparing children's skills, accomplishments, and behaviour to peers or social norms. Adolescence is especially vulnerable to these parental influences because it is a crucial time for the development of identity and self-esteem. The goal of this study is to investigate how parental comparison culture affects teenage self-esteem and mental health in metropolitan Indian environments. The goals are to determine how parental comparison affects self-esteem, how it affects anxiety, stress, and depression, and how gender and socioeconomic status moderate this relationship. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, measures of anxiety, stress, and depression, and a parental comparison scale were among the standardised tools used to gather data from teenagers between the ages of 13 and 19 in this quantitative, cross-sectional study design. The associations between the variables were examined using statistical methods including regression analysis and correlation. The results show that teenagers with higher levels of unfavourable parental comparison had significantly poorer self-esteem and more psychological discomfort. While positive or uplifting comparisons have comparatively weaker impacts, frequent negative comparisons lead to feelings of inadequacy, diminished self-worth, and increased emotional issues. The study also shows that the degree of these consequences is influenced by gender and socioeconomic level. Overall, the study underscores the significance of parenting techniques in the development of adolescents and stresses the necessity of raising parental awareness of the psychological dangers of excessive comparison. The results have

applications for therapies, counselling techniques, and awareness campaigns that promote better parent-child connections and enhance the wellbeing of adolescents.

Keywords: *Anxiety, Urban India, Self-Esteem, Teenagers, Mental Health, Parenting Style, And Parental Comparison*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial developmental period marked by changes in the body, mind, emotions, and social interactions. It is the stage that occurs between the ages of 10 and 19 and marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents start developing their identity, self-concept, emotional independence, and social awareness at this time. They become more sensitive to social assessment and outside criticism, especially from peers, parents, teachers, and the general public.

Physical changes brought on by puberty heighten emotional sensitivity and self-consciousness. Mood swings, insecurity, and emotional instability are frequently caused by hormonal fluctuations. Adolescents compare themselves to others more because they are more conscious of their appearance, skills, accomplishments, and social standing. Adolescents go into the formal operational stage of cognitive development, where they acquire logical reasoning and abstract thought, according to Jean Piaget. This enables them to consider how other people see them critically. Adolescence is the "Identity versus Role Confusion" period, according to Erik Erikson, during which people try to establish a consistent and significant identity. At this point, emotional validation and parental support become crucial.

One of the most crucial psychological features of adolescence is self-esteem. It alludes to a person's assessment of their own competency and value. While low self-esteem is linked to insecurity, anxiety, sadness, and emotional pain, adolescents with high self-esteem are typically more self-assured, emotionally stable, and resilient.

Adolescent mental health and self-esteem are significantly impacted by parental behaviour. Adolescents who receive supportive parenting techniques—such as encouragement, emotional warmth, and helpful guidance—develop emotional resilience and self-assurance. On the other hand, excessive comparison and criticism might make one feel less valuable and more insecure.

Emotional, psychological, and social well-being are all considered aspects of mental health. Teens who are in good mental health are more equipped to handle stress, form wholesome relationships, and control their emotions.

However, teenagers are more susceptible to anxiety, stress, and depression due to growing academic pressure, competition, and social expectations. One significant family component influencing teenage mental health is parental comparison culture. Comparing kids to their friends, siblings, family members, or socially idealised standards is referred to as this practice.

Parents frequently employ comparison as a motivational technique to promote improved behaviour and self-control. However, constant comparison can lead to emotional unease and psychological strain.

People assess themselves by contrasting their skills and accomplishments with those of others, according to Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory. Teenagers are particularly susceptible to social comparison since they are still forming their sense of self and identity. Regular comparison can cause self-doubt, feelings of inadequacy, and inferiority. Adolescents who feel appreciated only when they outperform others may develop conditional self-worth as a result of parental comparison. Fear of failing, perfectionism, ongoing stress, and reliance on outside approval can result from this. Teenagers may start to think that achievement, not personal traits, determines parental approval.

Adolescent psychological development is also impacted by parenting practices. Diana Baumrind distinguished between permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting approaches. Emotional warmth, appropriate discipline, and communication are all components of authoritative parenting. Teens who grow up in these kinds of settings typically acquire greater emotional stability and self-worth.

Strict control, harsh criticism, and little emotional warmth are traits of authoritarian parenting. Teens who grow up in these kinds of settings may suffer from anxiety, low self-esteem, emotional instability, and a fear of failing.

Emotional warmth combined with little instruction and discipline characterises permissive parenting. Adolescents may feel emotionally supported, but self-control and coping mechanisms may suffer from a lack of structure.

A distinct cultural backdrop for comprehending parental comparison culture is offered by urban Indian households. Because education is frequently seen as the primary route to social mobility and financial security, academic accomplishment is highly prized. Parents and teenagers are under more pressure due to competitive school systems, entrance exams, rankings, and social expectations. To encourage success, parents could make comparisons between their kids and classmates, siblings, cousins, or peers.

In many homes, people frequently say things like "look how well your cousin performs" or "other children score higher marks." Teenagers frequently take these comparisons as criticism or discontent, even when they are meant to be encouraging. In India, parental comparison practices are also influenced by collectivist cultural ideals. Achievement, social acceptance, and family reputation are highly prized. Children's achievement is frequently seen as a reflection of parental skill and family standing. As a result, parents may experience social pressure to maintain discipline and good achievement.

In metropolitan environments, comparison culture has become more prevalent due to social media and digital exposure. Online, adolescents are continuously exposed to idealised depictions of popularity, intelligence, success, and beauty. Additionally, parents may use their children's accomplishments on social media to compare them to others. Teenagers experience more emotional strain and self-consciousness as a result.

Adolescent self-esteem and mental health are adversely affected by excessive parental comparison. Teenagers may experience despair, worry, emotional weariness, fear of failure, and low self-esteem.

While some could lose motivation or emotionally retreat, others might become perfectionistic. The current study intends to investigate how teenage mental health and self-worth in metropolitan Indian families are affected by parental comparison culture. Since adolescence is a delicate time when emotional experiences have a significant impact on long-term personality development and psychological well-being, it is critical to comprehend this relationship.

2. Review of Literature

Zhang and Chen (2026) examine the role of parental comparison practices within digital environments, particularly focusing on how social media intensifies comparison culture. Their study highlights that parents increasingly engage in public or semi-public comparisons of their children's achievements with peers, which amplifies adolescents' awareness of evaluation. The findings indicate that such exposure is associated with significantly lower self-esteem and heightened anxiety levels among adolescents. The effect is especially pronounced in collectivist cultures, where social evaluation and conformity are already emphasized. The study concludes that digital platforms act as a powerful multiplier of traditional comparison practices, making them more visible, persistent, and psychologically impactful.

Similarly Martinez and Silva (2025) explore the interaction between parenting styles and parental comparison practices in shaping adolescent identity and self-esteem. Their

research distinguishes between authoritative and authoritarian parenting, demonstrating that authoritative parenting—characterized by warmth and support—can buffer the negative effects of comparison to some extent. In contrast, authoritarian parenting, which emphasizes control and obedience, intensifies the harmful impact of comparisons. Adolescents in such environments are more likely to internalize negative evaluations, leading to identity confusion and reduced self-worth. The study underscores the importance of parenting style as a moderating factor in the effects of comparison.

Also on the other hand Nguyen and Lee (2024) conduct a cross-cultural analysis of comparison norms across Asian and Latin American societies. Their study reveals that parental comparison is deeply embedded in cultural expectations and socialization practices. While comparison is often intended as motivation, the findings show that frequent exposure is linked to poorer psychological adjustment, including reduced self-esteem and increased stress. However, the intensity of these effects varies across cultures, suggesting that cultural interpretation of comparison plays a significant role. The authors emphasize the need to understand comparison practices within their sociocultural context.

Even Patel and Kumar (2023) focus on Indian adolescents, examining how parental expectations and comparison contribute to academic pressure and self-esteem issues. Their findings indicate that comparison with peers and siblings is a common parenting practice in India, often tied to educational achievement. Adolescents exposed to such comparisons report higher stress levels and diminished self-worth. However, the study also finds that authoritative parenting can partially mitigate these negative outcomes by providing emotional support and validation. The research highlights the cultural specificity of comparison practices while reinforcing their psychological consequences.

But Garcia and Torres (2022) investigate the role of comparison culture within European families, particularly in Spain. Their study demonstrates that even within supportive parenting environments, frequent comparison undermines adolescent well-being. Adolescents who are compared to siblings or peers report lower self-esteem and higher emotional distress. The findings suggest that comparison operates as an independent risk factor, capable of weakening the benefits of otherwise positive parenting styles. This challenges the assumption that authoritative parenting alone is sufficient for optimal development.

Similarly Li and Wang (2021) examine parental comparison practices in Chinese families, where such behaviors are culturally normative. Their study finds a strong negative association between comparison and adolescent self-esteem. The effects are particularly severe in authoritarian households, where comparison is often combined with strict discipline and high

expectations. Adolescents in these environments experience increased pressure and a heightened sense of inadequacy. The study concludes that cultural acceptance of comparison does not negate its psychological costs.

On the other hand Brown and Johnson (2020) provide a meta-analytic review of studies on parenting styles and self-esteem, synthesizing findings from nearly two decades of research. Their analysis confirms that authoritative parenting is generally associated with higher self-esteem and better psychological outcomes. However, they identify parental comparison as a key moderating variable that can significantly reduce these positive effects. The study highlights the need to consider specific parenting practices, not just overall style, when evaluating adolescent outcomes.

Another research of Chan and Bowes (2019) explore parenting styles and children's adjustment in Hong Kong, emphasizing the role of comparison culture. Their findings indicate that comparison is a common parental strategy used to motivate children. However, frequent comparison is associated with lower self-esteem and increased emotional difficulties. The study also shows that authoritative parenting can buffer these effects, while authoritarian parenting exacerbates them. This reinforces the idea that both cultural context and parenting style influence the impact of comparison.

Even Milevsky et al. (2018) examine maternal and paternal parenting styles and their association with adolescent self-esteem, depression, and life satisfaction. Their study finds that authoritative parenting is linked to positive outcomes, including higher self-esteem and life satisfaction. In contrast, authoritarian parenting is associated with negative outcomes, particularly when combined with frequent comparison practices. Adolescents in such environments report higher levels of depression and lower self-worth.

2.1 Research Gap

Academic pressure, performance expectations, and social competition among teenagers have all significantly increased in recent years, especially in metropolitan Indian contexts. Rapid urbanisation, globalisation, and the impact of social media have made success criteria more apparent and demanding. In such a setting, parents typically use comparison-based strategies to inspire their kids by comparing their performance to that of their siblings, peers, or family members. Despite the fact that this practice—known as "parental comparison culture"—is firmly anchored in society norms and collectivistic beliefs, little is known about its psychological effects on teenagers. Families that live in cities and metropolitan areas with fast-paced lifestyles, easier access to technology and education, and more exposure to cultural

influences from around the world are referred to as urban Indian families. Though there are some exceptions, these families typically have a nuclear structure with parents and kids.

Urban environments frequently place a strong emphasis on social mobility, career success, and academic achievement, which causes parents to have high expectations for their kids. The inclination toward comparison is further reinforced by elements including peer comparison, competitive educational environments, and social media exposure. Urban Indian families may face more social scrutiny and performance pressure than rural families, which may have an impact on parenting styles and parent-child relationships. Identity formation, emotional sensitivity, and an increased desire for approval and validation are all hallmarks of adolescence, a delicate developmental stage. During this time, a person's confidence, judgement, and general mental health are greatly influenced by their level of self-esteem. Adolescents who experience negative comparisons on a regular basis may internalise feelings of inadequacy, which can lead to low self-esteem, self-doubt, and an increased vulnerability to psychological problems like anxiety, stress, and depression. Parental comparison is frequently accepted and even justified as a motivational technique despite these possible drawbacks, which results in a lack of knowledge about its detrimental impacts.

Parenting styles and academic pressure have been thoroughly studied in the field of developmental and educational psychology; however, there is a small amount of literature that particularly addresses parental comparison culture as an independent variable, especially in the Indian urban context. Additionally, there hasn't been enough discussion of the relationship between parental comparison, parenting approaches, and teenage psychological results. The purpose of this study is to close this gap by methodically investigating the connection between teenagers' self-esteem, mental health, and parental comparison culture. The research attempts to offer empirical evidence on how comparison practices impact teenagers' psychological well-being by utilising standardised measures such the Parenting Style Scale, Parental Comparison Scale, and Self-Esteem Scale. The study is important since it adds to the body of knowledge and has useful ramifications for educators, parents, and mental health specialists. In the end, the results of this study can encourage better parenting techniques that support teenagers' emotional growth and increase awareness of the possible drawbacks of excessive comparison. Over time, these insights can help create supportive family situations, boost self-esteem, and improve teenagers' general mental health in urban Indian homes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

To examine the impact of parental comparison culture on adolescents self-worth and mental health in urban Indian families .

3.2 Objectives

- To assess the impact of parental comparison culture and parenting style on adolescents mental health.
- To assess the role of social media comparison culture with parenting style .
- To test weather academic pressure leads to low self-worth in adolescents in parental comparison culture.
- To find the difference in parental comparison culture and parenting style on self-worth of adolescents.

3.3 Hypotheses

- Parental comparison culture and parenting style will have significant impact on adolescents mental health in urban Indian families.
- Social media comparison intensity will strengthen negativity of parental comparison culture.
- Parental comparison culture will show a moderate significance of academic pressure in parental comparison culture.
- There will be significance parental comparison in parenting style and self-esteem of adolescents.

3.4 Demographics and Samples

Age: 13 year – 18 years

Area: Urban area

Socio Economic Status: Low, middle and high socio economic background

Education: School going adolescents (class 8th to 12th)

Sample Size: 200 total survey (100 adolescents vs 100 parents)

3.5 Samples

Independent Variable

Parental comparison culture and parenting style

Dependent Variables

Adolescent mental health and self-worth

The connection between the variables

The project is to investigate how adolescents' mental health and sense of self-worth are impacted by parental comparison culture and various parenting philosophies, as well as whether particular parenting philosophies amplify or lessen the effects of comparison.

3.6 Research Design

The present study used a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between parental comparison culture and adolescent mental health and self-worth.

3.7 Tools

The tools used in this study are:

RSES, or Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: One of the most popular tools for assessing global self-esteem is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which Morris Rosenberg created in 1965. It evaluates a person's overall perception of their own value and acceptance. Ten statements concerning both positive and negative feelings about oneself make up the scale. Statements like "I feel that I have a number of good qualities" and "At times I think I am no good at all" are two examples. On a 4-point Likert scale that goes from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," respondents indicate how much they agree. To account for response bias, five of the ten items are positively worded and five are negatively worded. During analysis, the negatively worded items receive a reversal score. better scores on the scale of 10 to 40 indicate better levels of self-esteem. The scale is perfect for this study since it is straightforward, trustworthy, and appropriate for teenagers. It has shown great validity in a variety of cultural contexts, including India, and high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha is usually above 0.80). The RSES is used in this study to measure teenagers' self-esteem levels and investigate how parental comparison and parenting methods affect them.

Parental Culture Comparison Scale: The Parental Comparison Culture Scale is intended to gauge how much teenagers believe their parents are making comparisons between them and other people. This scale might be modified or created in light of earlier research and cultural context. Statements like "My parents compare my academic performance with others" or "I feel pressured when my parents talk about other children's achievements" are examples of both direct and indirect comparison behaviours. A Likert scale (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) is used by participants to respond. The measure evaluates many aspects of comparison, such as emotional impact, kind (behavioural, social, intellectual), and frequency. Greater perceptions of parental comparison are indicated by higher scores. In the Indian culture, where comparison is frequently accepted as a motivational tactic, the scale is especially pertinent. In this study, it aids in measuring the level of comparison that teenagers go through and enables statistical analysis of its connection to mental health and self-esteem.

Pilot testing, which includes metrics like Cronbach's alpha, should be used to determine the scale's validity and reliability.

Scale of Parenting Style: The Parenting Style Scale is a tool designed to evaluate how parents raise their kids in general. It is typically based on Baumrind's division of parenting styles into three categories: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative (neglectful is occasionally added as a fourth type). Warmth, control, discipline, and communication are just a few of the aspects measured by the scale's statements. Items are rated on a Likert scale by respondents, who may be parents or teenagers, depending on the design. Statements like "My parents listen to my opinions" (authoritative), "My parents expect me to follow rules without questioning" (authoritarian), and "My parents allow me to do whatever I want" (permissive) are a few examples of items. The prevalent parenting style is ascertained by calculating scores based on the replies. The Parenting Style Scale, which has been widely used in psychological research and has shown good reliability and validity, is significant for this study because it aids in understanding the context in which parental comparison occurs. Different parenting styles may influence how comparisons are communicated and interpreted; for example, authoritarian parenting may intensify the negative effects of comparison, while authoritative parenting may buffer them.

4. Discussion and Results

The current study looked at how adolescent mental health and self-worth in metropolitan Indian homes were affected by parental comparison culture. The results show that teenage psychological wellbeing is considerably impacted by excessive parental comparison. Teenagers who compare themselves to others frequently likely to become more emotionally insecure and have poorer self-esteem. Adolescents who compare themselves to others start judging themselves based on external norms rather than internal development, which leads to feelings of inadequacy.

The Social Comparison Theory, which argues that people assess themselves by comparing themselves to others, is supported by the study. Regular upward comparison might cause feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, and discontent. Conditional self-worth may also result from parental comparison. Teenagers could think they are only appreciated when they outperform their peers. This exacerbates emotional strain and the fear of failing.

The results also show that worry, tension, and sadness are strongly correlated with parental comparison. Teenagers who are subjected to constant comparison frequently suffer from persistent anxiety, emotional tiredness, and pressure to do well. Because academic

success is closely linked to social standing and family reputation, urban Indian culture exacerbates these impacts even more. Parental pressure on teenagers is increased by social expectations and competitive educational institutions. By continuously exposing teenagers to idealised accomplishments and lifestyles, social media also reinforces comparison culture. Parental pressure and online comparison might further lower self-esteem.

The study highlights the importance of supportive parenting practices. Adolescents perform better emotionally and academically when parents focus on encouragement, emotional validation, and personal growth instead of constant comparison. Healthy parent-child communication is important for adolescent confidence and emotional well-being. Parents should recognize individual strengths and avoid unrealistic expectations.

The study's overall conclusions indicated that parenting style and parental comparison culture are significant factors in the emotional experiences and self-esteem development of adolescents. The majority of parents exhibited traits of authoritative parenting, including warmth, guidance, and communication. But some parents also exhibited authoritarian traits, such as severe punishment and high standards. Many teenagers reported feeling moderate to high levels of parental comparison pressure, which seemed to be linked to feelings of inadequacy, emotional stress, decreased confidence, and poorer self-esteem. The results of the regression and ANOVA also indicated that while excessive parental comparison may have a detrimental impact on adolescent self-worth and emotional adjustment, supportive parenting behaviours have a favourable impact on adolescent emotional well-being.

5. Conclusion

The current study investigated how teenage mental health and self-worth in metropolitan Indian homes are affected by parental comparison culture. The results imply that excessive parental comparison has a detrimental impact on the psychological health of adolescents.

Teens who are frequently compared to others have poorer self-esteem, higher levels of stress, anxiety, emotional uncertainty, and depressive symptoms. Comparison increases reliance on other people's approval and puts pressure on people to live up to external norms.

Urban Indian families are influenced by academic competition, collectivist cultural values, and social expectations, which contribute to comparison practices. Although parents may compare children with the intention of motivating them, excessive comparison often produces emotional distress rather than healthy motivation. Supportive parenting practices such as encouragement, emotional warmth, healthy communication, and appreciation of

individual strengths are more beneficial for adolescent development. Parents should focus on personal growth rather than competition.

The study highlights the need for parents to be more conscious of the psychological impacts of comparison. Counsellors, schools, and mental health specialists should all support awareness campaigns that support teenage emotional health and good parenting. Future studies should look at long-term psychological effects and compare parents in various cultural contexts.

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