

# Effects of Different Parenting Styles on Mental Health and Academic Outcomes for Adolescents from Different Cultural Backgrounds

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**Abstract.** This literature review aims to find the impacts of different parenting styles on the mental health and academic outcomes of adolescents from different cultural backgrounds. The results of the literature review showed that parenting styles demonstrate a significant impact on adolescents' mental status and academic performance. Generally speaking, the authoritative parenting style which is characterized by a high level of warm care, rational communication, prioritization of independence and achievements, moderate control, and a low level of severity was found to be the most effective type. However, the results also indicated that the effects of parenting styles on adolescents are influenced by different cultural backgrounds and social norms. Therefore, future studies are suggested to take cultural factors and individual differences into account.

**Keywords:** Parenting styles; Adolescents; Mental health; Academic outcomes; Cultural difference.

## 1. Introduction

As the intermediate stage from childhood to adulthood, adolescence is a sensitive period for both teenagers and their parents due to the rapid development of teenagers' biological and psychological aspects. Parents of adolescents are trying to figure out the most effective approach to be engaged in the education of their children, checking their parenting styles, and promoting guidance to their children (Merlin et al., 2013). In addition, it's very common for parents to adjust their parenting styles during adolescence to respond to their children's emerging new characteristics (Kerr et al., 2012).

Much past research indicated that parenting styles are consequential for children's mental health and academic performance (Baumrind, 1991; Ishak et al., 2012). However, most of these studies focused on middle-class families from Western countries which lack of consideration of different cultural backgrounds and individual reasons such as parents' internal goals. These factors may also play a role in influencing parenting styles (Chao, 2000; Kang, 2011). To address these limitations, I conduct a review of the literature, focusing particularly on the relationship among different parenting styles, cultural backgrounds, and adolescents' mental health, life satisfaction, and academic performance. Via my review, I hope to promote a better understanding of parenting styles and discuss some new perspectives on the effects of parents on their children.

## 2. Four Types of Parenting Styles

Baumrind (1991) proposed a widely accepted typology of parenting that divides parenting styles into four categories: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting parents. The categories were created based on the level of demandingness and responsiveness from parents to their children (see Figure 1). Authoritative parents are nurturing and supportive while having high standards of expectation for their children. At the same time, they want their child to develop self-assertion and self-regulation, take responsibility for themselves, and develop their ability to self-regulation and collaborate with others. Authoritative parents are responsible, set clear guidelines and rules for and supervise the child's behaviors, and depend on clear explanations and reasoning instead of threats or punishments to achieve parental control. Different from authoritative parents, authoritarian parents want their children to obey, respect the authority, and obedience, respect for authority, and preserve hierarchy. Authoritarian parents supervise their children through strict discipline and punishments, show a high level of control over their children's conduct, and have low intention to communicate or explain. Permissive parents are also loving and supportive, show a low

level of demandingness and control, and usually have few rules toward their children. Most of the time, permissive parents seem more like friends than parental figures. Finally, rejecting-neglecting parents are dismissive, have a low level of control, make few demands from their children, are the least sensitive to their children's needs, and might even be completely neglectful (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).



**Figure 1.** The differences among parenting styles based on the level of demandingness and responsiveness (Stuart, 2015)

### 3. Mental Health Status

Mental well-being is critical for optimal individual development. Research has consistently shown a remarkable influence of parenting style on depressive symptoms of adolescents from all ethnic backgrounds (Radziszewska et al., 1996). Shek conducted research in a Chinese secondary school and the results showed that parenting styles were found to be the main determinant of adolescents' mental well-being (Shek, 1995).

Authoritarian parenting was found to be connected with less positive adjustment and a lower level of independence for children (Baumrind, 1991). Adolescents with controlling parents have lower self-esteem, are more likely to have depressive symptoms, and show higher suicidal intentions or suicidal behaviors than children with authoritative parents (Greening et al., 2010; Nguyen, 2008). Moreover, they show less life satisfaction, lower levels of extroversion, and are less willing to trust other people than children with authoritative parents (Baumrind, 1991). Adolescents with authoritarian parents also showed less capability for emotional regulation, self-regulation, and self-control (Williams et al., 2012). In 2001, Qian and Xia conducted a study on the relationship between adolescents' mental health status and parenting styles and found that more perceived warm care from both parents contributes to fewer mental health issues reported by adolescents (Qian & Xia, 2001). Different from authoritarian parenting, adolescents with authoritative parents are more independent and confident, have higher self-esteem and self-efficacy, and hold more positive regard toward themselves (Nguyen, 2008). In addition, results showed no connection between authoritative parenting and children's suicidal intentions and behaviors (Greening et al., 2010). In short, children with authoritative parents

show fewer mental health problems than other parenting styles, particularly the authoritarian style (Merlin et al., 2013).

Negative effects on adolescents' mental health have been found for permissive parenting as well. Children with permissive parents may show a high level of confidence but also high aggression and deficiencies in both self-control and independence (McClun & Merrell, 1998). However, the association between permissive parenting and children's suicidal ideations or behaviors remains unknown. But due to struggling with low self-regulation and impulse control, they are more likely to show self-destructive behaviors (Greening et al., 2010). And children with rejecting-neglecting parents who have the lowest engagement in their role report a higher frequency of deviant behaviors such as drinking and smoking and higher disengagement from school (McClun et al., 1998). Moreover, they show the lowest level of psychosocial adjustment ability, have problems with self-control, and show difficulties on cognitive competence tests (Glasgow et al., 1997). The highest level of depressive symptoms was reported by children with unengaged parents (Radziszemska et al., 1996).

#### 4. Academic Outcomes

Research on the influences of parenting styles on adolescents' academic achievements had drawn wide attention from educators and psychologists. Many previous studies indicated the significant connection between family elements and children's life competencies (e. g. Kainz et al., 2012). Parenting styles can demonstrate an important impact on children's academic performance on several dimensions including their learning habits, motivations, and their health status as mediators (Majumder, 2016).

Association between academic performance and children with authoritarian parents from past research is conflicting. Some research found that children with authoritarian parents are more likely to perform better in school (Ishak et al., 2012). Others showed that children from authoritarian parents have worse academic outcomes (Steinberg et al., 1994). A consistent finding, however, is that children with authoritarian parents are more extrinsically motivated instead of intrinsically motivated during learning (Chan & Chan, 2005). Different from the pattern of mixed results on the effect of authoritarian parenting on academic outcomes, research has conclusively shown the positive influences of authoritative parenting on academic performance. Children with authoritative parents showed superior academic performance and stronger school engagement than other parenting styles (Steinberg et al., 1994). Also, children with authoritative parents show a higher level of intrinsic motivation on studying (Chan et al, 2005).

As might be expected, permissive parents have fewer demands on their children's achievements than other parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991). Children with permissive parents may have lower academic performance because of their deficiencies in persistence (Kang & Moore, 2011). However, permissive parenting styles contribute to children's creativity and this association might due to a high degree of responsiveness which is critical for nurturing creativity (Baumrind, 1991). And the negative impacts on adolescents' academic outcomes were also found in rejecting-neglecting parenting.

#### 5. Parenting Styles under Different Cultural Backgrounds

Research has shown differences in parenting within different cultures on multiple dimensions of parenting including psychological control (Chen et al., 2021), autonomy support (Wang et al., 2012), and special techniques (Qian et al., 2001). Also, there are cultural differences concerning the impacts of parenting styles on adolescents. Much empirical evidence indicated the differences in individual self-esteem in western countries and eastern countries-----collectivism shared a social norm that self-enhancement, the foundational motivation of self-esteem, is not viewed as important as it's in individualism (Heine et al., 1999). The independence orientation prioritizes self-esteem and self-worth while the interdependence orientation, especially within China, prioritizes meeting societal standards, including high academic outcomes (Heine et al., 1999). Specifically, Chinese parents tend

to feel responsible for ensuring their children meet societal standards and tend to view adolescence as a time to take on increasing responsibilities to the family while American parents are more likely to consider adolescence as a time for children to build their independence (Chao, 1994; Qu et al., 2020). One outcome of this cultural difference is psychological control from parents or the manipulation of their children (Baber, 1996). American parents showed overall less control than Chinese parents (Ng et al., 2014). Due to the high pressure in the Chinese educational system which may overemphasize children's test scores and parents feeling responsible to ensure their children meet societal standards, it's more common for Chinese parents to use psychological control to make sure their children maintain high academic performance in school. Some parents from China would involve some techniques such as punishments, overprotection, and denial which contribute to more adolescents' somatic discomfort, compulsion, anxiety, depressive symptoms, aggression, mental disorders, and an unstable mental status (Qian et al., 2001). And perhaps because they received less psychological control from their parents, American adolescents showed a higher level of self-esteem which is positively related to enhanced emotional functions (Brown et al., 2009; Chen, 2021). However, Chinese adolescents showed better academic outcomes and higher academic engagement than their American peers (Chen, 2021).

However, it is important to note that psychological control from Chinese parents might be conditional (Wang et al., 2012). Chinese parents may provide autonomy support for their children during adolescence just as American parents which can contribute to adolescents' functioning in many areas such as emotional, academic, and behavioral well-being (Brenning et al., 2011). In 2012, Wang and colleagues conducted research on 341 Chinese adolescents in middle school and found that the autonomy supports from Chinese parents is determined by their self-development socialization goals (i.e., parents regard a positive sense of self as important for their children) and their children's school performance (Wang et al., 2012). If adolescents had high academic achievements in school, Chinese parents would show greater approval of self-development socialization goals, be more willing to provide autonomy support, and be less likely to apply psychological control. And if their children failed to do well in school, Chinese parents would show less autonomy support and more psychological control, despite their self-development socialization goals (Wang et al., 2012). The patterns in the data indicated the moderating effects of adolescents' academic outcomes on the relation between Chinese parents' self-development socialization goals and their autonomy support and psychological control. In addition, previous studies on parents' socialization goals and parenting styles found that self-development socialization goals were positively related to authoritative parenting and negatively related to authoritarian parenting among all ethnic groups (Li et al., 2010).

The relationship between academic performance and parenting styles is also moderated by cultural backgrounds. Dornbusch and colleagues found that the authoritative parenting style contributes to better academic achievements of European American students (Dornbusch et al., 1987). However, the authoritative parenting style was associated with poorer academic outcomes for Asian American students. Overall, the findings as described by Dornbusch indicated that authoritative parenting demonstrates better impacts on European American adolescents while authoritarian parenting contributes to higher academic achievements of Asian American adolescents (Dornbusch et al., 1987). In another study, Steinberg tested the effects of parenting styles among students of different ethnicities and found that compared with European American adolescents, parenting style was less favorable for Asian American adolescents (Steinberg et al., 1994).

Besides cultural differences, individual differences among parents also contribute to different parenting styles. Many researchers believed that the four types of parenting styles described by Baumrind based on cases from individualistic countries cannot describe parenting styles in collectivist societies such as China (e.g., Zhang et al., 2017). Chao and Kim et al. introduced training parenting (a huge dedication and sacrifice from mothers, but the supports are less likely to be emotional expressions such as compliments) and "tiger" parenting (a high level of control, ignorance of children's needs or self-esteem, and a strict manipulation over their children's spare time to make sure their achievements) (Chao, 2000; Kim et al., 2013). Based on previously described research,

there is evidence of cultural specificities in Chinese parenting which may include some extra parenting styles (Zhang et al., 2017).

## 6. Conclusion

Based on previously described studies, parenting styles have a significant effect on adolescents' mental health status and academic performance. Broadly speaking, the authoritative parenting style which is characterized by a high level of warm care, rational communication, prioritization of independence and achievements, moderate control, and a low level of severity was found to be the most effective type. However, the results also indicate that the impacts of parenting styles on adolescents are influenced by different cultural backgrounds and social norms. Therefore, future studies are suggested to take cultural factors and individual differences into account.

Because of sharing different social values and different priorities, parents vary their parenting styles. Chinese parents may increase their psychological control over their children while American parents provide more autonomy support. And the impacts of different parenting styles may also be moderated by cultural background since authoritarian parenting was explicitly found to be positively related to Chinese adolescents' academic performance. Moreover, individual differences such as parents' self-development socialization goals also influence their parenting styles.

With the rapid development in society, social norms of traditional eastern countries are continuously changing, there are plenty of unlabeled parenting styles around the world. Therefore, considering cultural differences among all ethnic groups and individual differences for both parents and their children, we shouldn't fix parenting styles in specific four categories and pay more attention to longer effects for individual developments.

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