

Early bonding, Parenting Styles and Temperament: Association between three-generational Aspect of Parenting

Husena Dhariwala¹, Shwetha T.S²

¹M.Phil. Clinical Psychology, ²Assistant Professor, Manipal College of Health Professions (MCHP) Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) Manipal, Udupi, Karnataka, India

Abstract

Background: Parenting styles differ with individuals. Early experiences play an important role to determine the nature of parenting. However, studies do not highlight dyadic views of partners as a unit in their parenting styles. Further, the critical age between 3-6 years is found to be vulnerable to environmental influences. Thus, the transactional influence in a three-generational viewpoint needs to be studied. The aim was to understand the three-generational aspect of parenting. The primary objective included understanding the relationship of early parental bonding on current parenting styles and its association with the temperament of pre-school aged children.

Method: 15 couples with children in preschool, aged between 3-6 years, of age range 20-40 years using a convenience sampling were recruited. The participants were assessed by the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), Parental Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) and Child Behaviour Questionnaire- Very Short Form (CBQ-VSF). The data was further analyzed using descriptive statistics for the socio-demographics and the association between the variables was assessed using Spearman's rank correlation.

Conclusion: Correlational analysis showed an authoritative parenting style positively correlated with effortful control and a negative correlation with the surgency dimension of temperament. No significant relationship between parental bonding and parenting styles was found.

Keywords: Parental bonding, Parenting styles, Pre-school, Temperament, Three-Generations

Introduction

An individual's first exposure to the world around them is through the family they are born into. The relationship between parent and child is the most important when compared to the different relationships formed through the course of life¹. Parenting is a continuous process from infancy to adulthood promoting and supporting the development (physical, emotional, social, and intellectual) of a child. Brooks rightly suggests

that the intricacies of raising a child are not limited to only a biological relationship.² Parenting practices have three major goals recognized throughout the world: providing for children's health and safety, instil skills to be productive adults, and impart cultural values.

Parker proposed a construct of parental bonding to understand this formation of bond that children form with parents. Despite a lack of a satisfactory definition, *bonding* may be defined as "the formation of a mutual emotional and psychological closeness between parents (or primary caregivers) and their newborn child".³ Factor analytical studies have conceptualized it based on bipolar factors such as "acceptance versus rejection", "psychological autonomy versus control" and "firm control versus lax control".³

Corresponding Author:

Dr.Shwetha.T.S

Assistant Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology
Manipal College of Health Professions(MCHP)
Manipal Academy of Higher Education(MAHE)
Manipal, Karnataka
Ph:+91-9880993080, E-mail:shwetha.ts@manipal.edu

Parenting style defined by Baumrind refers to “a pattern of child-rearing that is the result of parents’ reactions to their child or children”⁴. Three parenting styles i.e. authoritative, authoritarian, and permission forms were identified. Authoritative parenting style is identified as a democratic form of parenting. Baumrind suggested that these parents “monitor and impart clear standards for their children’s conduct”⁵. Permissive parenting style is referred to apply very few rules or boundaries, allowing children to dictate their life events and outrightly refuse compliance with the choices of others.⁵ Authoritarian parenting style is the domineering and dictatorial form of parenting.⁶

One of the major influencing factors in a child’s development is their innate dispositions i.e temperament which might evoke different parenting styles.⁷ Temperament is the building blocks of adult personality and can be broadly referred to the physical basis for expression and arousal of emotions and regulation components of personality.⁸ A dimensional approach used by Rothbart to understand these biological rooted individual differences resulted in three broad domains namely (1) Surgency i.e, factors of sociability and expressions of positive emotionality, (2) Negative affect encompasses discomfort, anger/frustration, sadness, fear, and low soothability and (3) Effortful Control is related attentional, inhibitory and activational control.⁷

Secure attachment bonds with parents pave the path to better interpersonal relationships as adults. However, factors such as gender and culture play a significant role in determining the establishment of a parental bond as well as the style of parenting chosen by these adults. Eastern cultures (such as in Japan) have been reported to be superior in the parent-child relationship as compared to western countries.⁹ Gender difference studies indicate females have a stronger perceived bond with both the parents and higher score of domains of care vs overprotection.^{3, 9, 10}

Authoritative mode of parenting is suggestive to be the most optimal form of parenting style and studies have indicated that adolescents, as well as parent perceived form of parenting, is also on similar strategies.^{3,10} Research on parenting styles suggests that while authoritarian parenting has indirect effects on happiness, authoritative styles can predict constructs

of self-awareness and optimism domains of emotional intelligence.¹¹ Authoritative parenting can also predict effortful control and behavioural inhibition dimensions of temperament. E.g. a study done in 2008 showed mothers using commands and disciplinary statement in a positive tone as compared to a neutral tone had a higher score of effortful control on their pre-school children.¹² The focus of studies in the relationship of parenting and temperament has not remained on causality but also a bi-directional relationship was suggested.¹³

There is growing evidence to understand the presence of intergenerational continuity of parenting style; the understanding of developmental ‘sequelae’ of parenting.¹⁴ Prospective studies following the same individual through the years have found significant continuity of harsh or positive parenting across the two generations.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ These findings also can be considered valid when teen pregnancy is considered. The intergenerational adverse parenting may, in turn, indicate poor decision making as well as unadjusted mothers.¹⁸ A study on teenage mothers with postpartum depression suggested that adolescents who reported low paternal care and high maternal control could predict impaired postpartum maternal bonding.¹⁸

These studies point strongly to long term outcomes of parent-child exchange and the bi-directional process to development. That is, a child’s developmental trajectory can be influenced by parenting in early childhood along with, the child influencing the nature of parenting received in return; an interplay of psychological, social and/or genetic factors.¹⁸ However, there is a lack of depth in understanding how different factors of parenting styles affect the temperament differently and determining factors that can be helpful in the developmental phase of children. Further, the critical age between 3-6 years is found to be vulnerable to environmental influences and Indian research of this three-generational aspect has not been studied.

The current study aims to understand the association of early bonding on current parenting styles of the participants and look further into the relationship between the parenting and the temperamental aspects of pre-school children. Two primary objectives were tested. The first goal is to understand whether early parental bonding of participants with their parents (both mother

and father) has any connection to their chosen form of parenting. Early childhood is understood as a vulnerable period of development. This brought forward the second objective of the study i.e, to examine the association between the said parenting styles on the temperament of their pre-school aged children.

Method

Sample size: 15 married couples

Study design and participants:

Based on convenience sampling techniques, individuals with the age group of 20-40 and at least one child currently enrolled in pre-school (3-6 years) were considered. Participants with a minimum 10th standard education were included in the study. Participants with any psychiatric illness or single or divorced couples were excluded from the study. The study was approved by the institutes' ethics committee. Participants' were recruited through contacting pre-schools in and around Manipal and Udupi district, Karnataka, India as a secondary mode of contact through their children.

Procedure:

After clearance from the institute ethics committee, pre-schools were contacted, and permission was sought for the recruitment of participants. The project was also registered with the Clinical Trial Registry of India (CTRI). For the process of convenience in data collection, the measures were translated in the regional language i.e, Kannada. During data collection, the school authorities and respected coordinators were oriented to the process and nature of the study. Based on participants who met the inclusion criteria, the parents were contacted by the school authorities, and questionnaires were distributed along with a participant information sheet and informed consent. Confidentiality was assured to the participants and they were asked to report as honestly as possible.

Measures:

The questionnaire consisted of a socio-demographic profile with Details about participants age and birth order,

education and occupation, type of marriage, and years of being married. They further provided information regarding the number of children they have, the age and birth order of the child currently in the pre-school. The variables were assessed using (i) Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) for Parental Bonding, Parental Styles and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ) for Parenting Styles and Child Behaviour Questionnaire-Very Short Form (CBQ-VSF) for Temperament.

PBI is a 25-item retrospective measure to assess parental styles, individually of both the mother and father, as perceived as a child. It is based on how they remember their parents during their first 16 years of life. The scale has two domains of care and protection on a 4- point Likert scale.¹⁹ PSDQ measures the three types of parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive based on a 32-item version 5-point Likert scale.²⁰ CBQ-VSF is a 36-item questionnaire assesses three broad domains of temperament namely, surgency, negative affect and empathy based on a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from Extremely Untrue of your child (1) to Extremely True (7), and Not Applicable.²¹

Statistical Analysis

The data were subjected to analysis using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24.0). Descriptive statistics were used for socio-demographic variables. Spearman Rank Correlation was used to understand the relationship between the three variables.

Results

The results showed that the mean age of parents was found to be $M = 33.73 \pm 4.3$ years. Majority of the participants were post-graduates (50%), identified as Hindus (86.7%), lived in a nuclear family (60%) and had had an arranged marriage (60%). The average years of the couple's marriage were $M = 7.9 \pm 3.5$ years and the age of pre-school children was $M = 3.65 \pm 0.65$. (Table 1)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

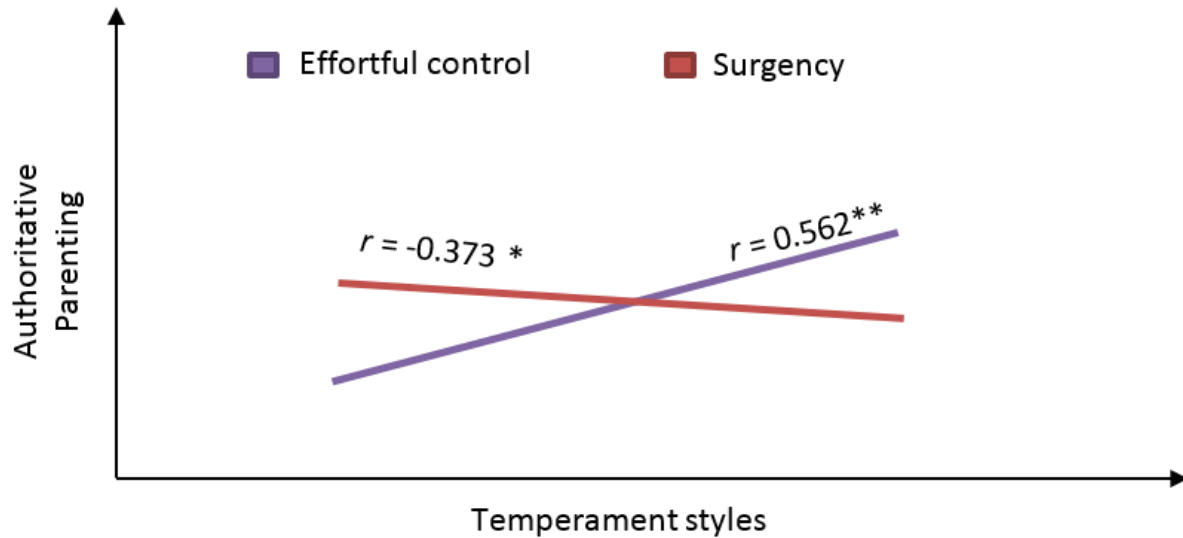
Characteristics		N= 30 (15 couples)
Age (in years)		33.73 ± 4.3
Education	Post-Graduates	50%
	Graduates	40%
	Other	10%
Religion	Hindu	86.7%
	Others	13.3%
Duration of Marriage (in years)		7.9 ± 3.5
Type of marriage	Arranged	80%
	Love	20%
Family type	Nuclear	60%
	Extended	40%
No. of children	Single	60%
	Two or more	40%
Pre-school child's age (in years)		3.65 ± 0.65

Correlational analysis between early parental bonding and current parenting styles did not have any significant results (Table 2). Analysis of parenting styles and temperament indicates that there is a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.562$) of authoritative parenting style with effortful control dimension in children. On the other hand, there is a negative correlation ($r = -0.373$) between authoritative parenting style and surgency dimension of temperament (Figure 1)

Table 2: Relationship between Early Bonding & Parenting Styles

Correlations		Parenting Styles		
		Authoritative	Authoritative	Authoritative
Parental Bonding	Mother (Care)	- .231	.236	.024
	Mother (Control)	- .095	- .302	-.233
	Father (Care)	- .216	.252	.098
	Father (Control)	.118	- .210	-.098

at 0.05 level; ** at 0.01 level of significance



* at 0.05 level; ** at 0.01 level of significance

Figure 1: Relationship between Authoritative parenting and temperament.

Discussion

The study focused on understanding the generational aspects of parenting and find associations of the same with the temperament of pre-school aged children. The current study adds to our current knowledge in the field of parenting.

The study findings indicate that the first hypothesis stands true, i.e., there is no significant relationship between early bonding of participants with their current parenting styles. Regarding the second hypothesis, the authoritative style of parenting was associated with changes in temperament during early childhood. With greater authoritative parenting style greater is the effortful control of the child. It could be possible that positive emotions such as warmth and support given by the parents help develop self-regulation in children. The moderation of responsiveness and demandingness of parental domains as suggested by Baumrind indicates an easier temperament. Previous research has similar findings wherein positive parenting practices have high effortful control whereas negative coercive parenting predicts more of externalizing factors.^{22, 23}

However, a low negative correlation was found between the authoritative style of parenting and surgency domain of temperament. Based on previous understanding, the predicted finding would be a direct

positive correlation. However, the current finding could be attributed to the skewed data where the children's age was as young as an average of 3.3 years. Thus, in most of the cases, the children have not had adequate exposure for socialization and responsibility. Another possible explanation based on previous literature is the recent evidence pointing to a bi-directional explanation between the two variables based on the transactional model of development.¹³

Limitations and future directions

Even though the preliminary findings of the study have interesting findings, there are certain limitations. Firstly, the sample size was small and skewed with most participants children around 3 to 3.5 years of age. Further, there was no direct contact with the participants to communicate the purpose of the study. Future studies can focus on conducting interviews with parents on a firsthand basis. Secondly, the objectives of the study limited data collection to couples only. Objective measures of temperament from children themselves could be taken up as a future target. Also, the data collection was from a restricted geographical location limiting generalization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the authoritative style of parenting

has an association with the temperament of the children. Also, there is a likelihood of a bi-directional relationship between the two variables i.e., parenting styles and temperament. Thus, early interventions strategies that focus on both parental training as well as targeting specific developmental targets for children can facilitate easy regulatory mechanisms for children. The study also highlights the need for further research on the impact of generations on parenting.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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