The Parental Causes and Effects of Parenting Styles on Cognitive and Emotional Development of Children

The tender relationship between parent and child has served as the backbone of not just familial units, but also for society as a whole across civilizations for millennia. Thus, the potential impact that certain types of parenting and attachment styles that a parent employs on their children must be studied for its relevance to the lives and long-term development of both parent and child. There is a link between maternal warmth and maternal overcontrol with depressive but not anxiety symptoms in fourth and fifth graders. Meanwhile, lacking maternal warmth increases maternal overcontrol and depression in fourth and fifth graders due to fear of failure (Fox, Sital, Halpern, and Ryan, 2023). Hence, research has focused on understanding what types of parenting techniques lead to both positive and negative effects on a child’s mental state over a prolonged period, from infancy to early adulthood. Through this, it can be possible to find ways to enhance the relationship between parent and child.

To gain a better grasp of this connection, clarifying the relationship between parenting styles and how it nurtures a child’s psychological condition would be beneficial. What parenting styles and techniques have the greatest effects on the cognitive, emotional, and psychological development of children from early childhood through adolescence and into adulthood? What are these effects in terms of the child’s thoughts and behaviors? Previous studies have already examined the principles of these questions and identified other areas of the parent-child relationship that could be addressed. This includes classifying a parenting technique or linking some specific parent’s behavior to a specific behavior in the child. Analyzing and presenting the findings within these studies could help expand the discussion of how to improve the
parent-child relationship by proposing reasonable, realistic, and efficient means for both the parents and their children.

**Relationship Between Parenting Styles and the Emotional State of Parents**

**Defining Parenting Styles**

Parenting styles refer to the methods by which a parent can interact with their child, with each style varying from the other in terms of its psychological effects and can be classified into different groups. First, a parent's level of demandingness refers to how many demands they place on their child, while their level of responsiveness entails how they respond and adapt to their children's development, if at all. With that in mind, an authoritative parenting style revolves around parents with high demandingness and responsiveness, or high structure and warmth. An authoritarian parenting style still has high demandingness, but parents are less responsive, so there is more structure with less warmth. Additionally, permissive, or indulgent, parenting styles have prominent levels of responsiveness but little demandingness, so increased warmth with decreased guidance, and neglectful parenting styles involve a severe lack of both, meaning the parents are hardly involved in their children's lives (Van der Horst and Sleddens, 2017).

Beyond these four primary styles, there are cognitive support styles that focus on how parents help their children learn. Parents can be scaffolders, where they diversify their teaching methods or other responsive behaviors to help their children learn new behaviors. Alternatively, they could be labelers, where they merely instruct their children to follow basic instructions without other guidance. Furthermore, parents could be followers that provide feedback to their child, who take initiative, or non-followers that utilize other means of engagement. (Wei, Ronfard, Leyva, and Rowe, 2019). Since scaffolders and followers emphasize the means for their children to grow, they embody authoritative and authoritative parenting styles, while labelers and non-followers have a more hands-off approach, like permissive and neglectful parents.

These parenting styles extend into feeding styles. More permissive or neglectful parents can exhibit indulgent feeding styles that result in a lack of care for nurturing
regulated feeding habits in their children. Conversely, authoritarian feeding styles see parents constantly involved in their children’s mealtimes and eating behaviors, requiring more demandingness amongst their children. (Anderson, Ferrante, Tauriello, and Anzman-Frasca, 2023).

Causes of Certain Parenting Styles and Emotional Effects on a Parent

A parent’s unique behaviors can lead to unique parenting styles, which might begin to explain the connection between parenting styles and children’s behaviors. For fathers of pre-and early adolescent children, considerable amounts of parental stress, coupled with authoritarian or permissive parenting styles, increase parental burnout amongst the fathers. It can also influence their children to engage in problematic behaviors. Authoritative and structured parenting styles, meanwhile, hindered parental burnout experienced by the fathers. (Ping, Wang, Yimin Li, and Yongxin Li, 2022).

The high-pressure environment placed on young children living with both an authoritarian and stressed-out father encouraged these children to express their frustration through participating in concerning behaviors, which only adds to the father’s burnout and stress. If one of the parents, like the father, cannot manage their levels of stress during their daily lives, the emotional burden of that stress will be expressed as negative parenting styles. This is likely why stressed fathers tend to be more authoritative and permissive. Their children would respond by expressing troublesome actions that would have to be dealt with on top of the stress, exacerbating the burnout and leading to more problem behaviors in turn.

Causes of Certain Parenting Styles and Emotional Effects on Both Parents

The emotional state of one parent can alter not just their parenting styles but can also alter the parenting styles of the other parent, affecting child development. A parent who is chronically depressed can influence the other parent to exhibit permissive parenting techniques, which can lead to their children expressing worrisome behaviors.
Over several years, these behaviors can make a mother more authoritarian or permissive and render a father more permissive, resulting in even more problem behaviors in the children (Kopala-Sibley, Jelinek, Kessel, Frost, Allmann, and Klein, 2017).

By being either authoritarian or permissive to their children, one parent can indirectly place an emotional burden on the second parent. The second parent would now have to manage their partner’s emotional woes, while simultaneously dealing with the problematic symptoms from their children that are occurring due to the stressed partner’s unstructured parenting styles. The combination of these factors could spiral into depressive conditions for both parents, leading to them being distracted from guiding their children’s development. It enables the authoritarian and permissive styles of parenting that further contributes to their children depicting detrimental behaviors. The absence of stress-regulation strategies in one parent, like a father, could alter the emotions and parenting styles of the other parent, negatively impacting their children and making it difficult to minimize the stress and burnout that fostered these neglectful circumstances.

Cognitive and Emotional Effects of Parenting Styles on Children

Defining Attachment Styles

Establishing a link between the emotional state of parents and their parenting styles now allows for the discussion of why some parenting styles, like the authoritarian and permissive styles of stressed and depressed parents, result in externalizing behaviors for children rather than other symptoms. One way of assessing a child’s relationship and view of their parents is the child’s attachment style. Secure attachment styles describe children who have a secure and reliable relationship with their parents. The child has healthy perceptions of themselves and their parents, along with healthy methods of self-regulation and stress management. All of these are a consequence of the child being able to trust and rely on their parents while cultivating independent attitudes. On the other hand, there are insecure attachment styles, where a child may
not have proper methods of coping with stress or self-regulation, resulting in the child displaying disorganized behaviors. There is also the possibility of the child developing emotional disorders later in life. Unlike secure attachment styles, insecure attachment styles arise because the child feels that they cannot fully trust or rely on the parents for certain reasons and can be further divided into anxious or avoidant attachment styles (Kamperman, Kooiman, Lorenzini, Aleknaviciute, Allen, and Fonagy, 2020).

**Cognitive Effects of Parenting Styles on Young Children**

The development of attachment styles can begin early on in children, likely because a parent and their methods of guidance play an instrumental role in early learning. To be more specific, the toddlers of Scaffolder parents (various teaching methods) learned novel and original words more efficiently than toddlers of Labelers (normal memorization). Likewise, the toddlers of Followers (providing positive feedback) were more engaged in their learning than the toddlers of Non-Followers (Wei et al., 2019). Evident by the toddler’s efficient rate of learning, scaffolders and followers not only demand their children to learn and remember new ideas but also respond to their children’s ongoing cognitive development, altering their parenting techniques to better accommodate their children’s needs. This falls in line with the authoritative parenting styles. Consequently, the children of these parents might possess both structure and warmth as they learn and grow, facilitating ideal conditions for a secure attachment and reducing parental stress and burnout.

If authoritative scaffolders and labelers can modulate their children’s cognitive behaviors in constructive ways, a more authoritarian and permissive style of parenting could induce detrimental cognitive effects in children, leading to insecurities. Parents of pre-adolescent children take greater pleasure in indulgent (neglectful) feeding styles at restaurants compared to at home amongst their children. Yet, such parents are more demanding of structured feeding habits in their children at home compared to restaurants, making more use of authoritarian feeding styles. This signals that parents are lenient in their overall feeding structures when dining at places with many meals, even if their children are present (Anderson et al., 2023). What elevates the concerning
nature of this discrepancy between private and public parenting is the phenomenon that restaurants are already under scrutiny by childhood obesity prevention programs. There are connections between indulgent feeding styles in parents and higher BMI in their children, along with the children eating more food on average (Anderson et al., 2023). A parent being more lenient in less stressful environments, like restaurants, could be a form of coping or stress management, which can divert attention away from the child and can quickly spiral into a lack of demandingness or responsiveness, allowing the indulgent feeding styles.

Immediately, it can be inferred that since there is a large disparity between these parents’ parenting styles in the household and public, there would be a sense of distrust and confusion manifesting within their young and impressionable children, as they could be unsure of what type of parental guidance (private or public) they should follow. The presence of scaffolders and labelers in their children’s lives affirms the pivotal but precarious role of parents in a child’s early learning, so the mismanagement of this role due to stress, burnout, or neglect would logically generate mixed feelings in the children. Distrust and confusion are indicators of an insecure attachment style, so these children could start viewing both private and public eating affairs as anxiety-inducing or stressful ordeals without ways to cope with the overwhelming emotions. The indulgent feeding habits of parents could enable future eating disorders and unhealthy eating habits in children, which might explain the higher BMI of these types of children.

**Emotional Effects of Parenting Styles on Older Children and Young Adults**

Having gone over how certain parenting styles, which are intertwined with a parent’s emotion regulation, direct a child’s cognitive development and even their attachment styles, the prolonged effects of these parenting styles on a child's mood as they grow into adults later in life can be explored. There is a negative relationship between the parents of university students embodying an authoritative parenting style with a secure attachment style and their college-aged children’s rates of depression. On the other end, there was a positive relationship between more authoritarian and permissive parents with avoidant attachment styles and the students’ depression levels,
meaning it is a contributing factor (Ebrahimi, Amiri, Mohamadlou, and Rezapur, 2017). The patterns that have been analyzed thus far, relating parents’ emotions to parenting styles, and how authoritative parenting styles yield positive cognitive effects on children while neglectful or authoritarian parenting styles typically do not, have been reinforced by the dissection of long-term parent-child relationships.

Since parents who conduct authoritative parenting likely have measures to cope with stressful emotions that may inhibit their parenting, it is also likely that they would teach these self-regulation strategies to their children. Due to this, the child would build trust and reliance with their parents, providing the child a better opportunity at developing similar coping techniques to minimize their stress and depression. This could be similar to university students who are children of authoritative and secure parents. Likewise, without a parental figure present to guide a child (i.e., those with permissive or authoritarian parenting styles), there is no reliable way for a child to gauge their cognitive progress, sowing feelings of anxiety that would contribute to depression. This is akin to stressed parents who are neglectful of their children and demonstrates why the children of avoidant parents can possess the same emotional issues. Regardless, the evolution of cognitive and emotional behaviors in children as they become adults affirms that parenting styles have a protracted impact on children of all ages, with the effects of parenting styles becoming more explicit as the child matures.

How to Improve the Relationship Between Parent and Child

Psychological Interventions

Parents are ingrained in the mental development of their children, with their methods of parenting having beneficial and harmful effects on both children and them. Hence, any avenues for enhancing this relationship through achieving specific parenting styles or other techniques can be examined and considered with the emotional state of the parents, the parenting styles of the parents, and the emotional and cognitive state of the child. The role of outside help in mediating the relationship between parent and child is relevant in these scenarios, especially in instances of the parent having a mental
illness and being unable to do much to reduce their stress and burnout. Narrowing down the focus to children that have at least one parent diagnosed with a mental illness and who have already received cognitive-behavior or psychoeducation interventions, 80% of these children internalized troubling symptoms, 47% began expressing prosocial behavior, and 33% even developed novel coping mechanisms for when they expressed behaviors harmful to themselves. Meanwhile, there was only a slight risk of the children developing a mental disorder in the future. To surmise, the psychotherapeutic interventions were significant in preventing children of mentally ill parents from expressing mentally ill symptoms one-year after they received the intervention. (Puchol-Martinez, Fernandez, and Santed-German, 2023).

Fortunately, for parents who cannot improve their parenting styles or regulate their moods due to psychological setbacks, there are many psychological measures they can take advantage of to provide their children with a way to cope with their emotions. This might help the children avoid expressing the symptoms of a mental disorder found in their parents, irrespective of the parents’ negative parenting styles. While the relationship between any parent and their children will vary in complexity and circumstance, making it strenuous to formulate universal methods to benefit both, increasing awareness of the psychological interventions that already exist can play a massive role in reducing parental burnout and encouraging warm and structured parenting styles. Otherwise, children can take advantage of psychological aid to boost their cognitive and emotional regulation capabilities, even while feeling insecure or lacking parental instruction.

The inner workings of the parent-child unit are dynamic and intricate. For instance, some evidence was derived from studies conducted in countries like Iran and China, which have distinct cultural and social values that Western countries, while other studies only included one parent rather than both. However, when laid out together, these studies illustrate how seemingly isolated variables, like parenting style, a parent’s mood, and a child’s cognitive growth, can all be related and impacted by one another. Despite not being able to draw definitive conclusions yet, the studies reinforce the notion that exhibiting healthy parenting styles and attachment styles can be a principal
factor in a child’s cognitive and emotional development, along with helping the parents to remain emotionally healthy. By comprehending what types of parenting styles and attachment styles can have positive or negative effects on children, parents can divert their attention to ways they can enhance their parenting techniques. Specifically, by trying to be less stressed or employing psychological means. From this analysis of parenting styles, parents can be more aware of how to think about their role as the guide in their children’s lives, hopefully allowing them to foster mentally healthy children for future generations.
References


