

Parenting Styles, Aggression and Alexithymia among Young Pakistani Adults

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The present study examined the relationship of parenting styles (permissive, authoritative, authoritarian) with aggression and alexithymia in emerging adult university students. Total 200 participants between ages 18 to 29 years ($M=21.72$; $SD=1.53$), 100 males between 19 to 29 years ($M=21.87$; $SD=1.47$) and 100 females between 18 to 26 years ($M=21.58$; $SD=1.58$) participated in this research. Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire and Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) were used for assessment. Correlational research design was used. Group testing was done. The results showed that permissive and authoritarian parenting styles were positively correlated with aggression and alexithymia in the sample. On the other hand, authoritative parenting style was negatively correlated with aggression and alexithymia. Authoritarian mother and authoritative mother parental style significantly predicted aggression, permissive mother and authoritarian mother parental styles significantly predicted alexithymia. These results highlight the significance of impact of parenting on emotional and behavioral problems in adulthood. These findings have clear implications for developing cognitive therapy based programs with a special focus on positive parenting, reducing aggression and alexithymia, particularly for the psychoeducation of offspring, parents and guardians.

Keywords: permissive parenting, authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting, aggression, alexithymia.

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Parental practices affect the development of a child's behaviors, emotions and thoughts at all stages of life. Many 18 years and above individuals live with their parents in different cultures of the world including Pakistan (Brooks-Gunn, 1988; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). In collectivist societies like Pakistan many parents feel the need to continue nurturing their children even in their adulthood (Stewart, Zaman, Dar, & Anwar, 2000). Parenting style represent standard strategies adopted by the parents for child rearing. The construct of parenting style is mainly based on Baumrind's work which include: Permissive; Authoritarian and Authoritative parenting. Research shows that permissive and authoritarian parenting saliently predict hostility and aggression in children (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Batool, 2013; Bloomquist, & Schnell, 2005; Casas et al., 2006). Parents adapting permissive parenting style are very responsiveness and less demanding (Baumrind, 1967), is linked to social problems like aggression, rule breaking and externalizing behaviors (Rizvi & Najam, 2015). Whilst, authoritarian parenting is the opposite of permissive parenting (Baumrind, 1967). Authoritarian parenting is related to negative behaviors like low emotional functioning, aggression and externalizing behaviors (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). On the contrary, authoritative parents have high demands but it is a healthy parenting style as it encourages to deal with children in a rational manner (Baumrind, 1967). Consistent with this, Steinberg (2001) has defined the authoritative parenting in terms of autonomy and support, which aids the positive results in children like self-regulation. Parenting mediates the development of aggression, prosocial or anti-social characteristic in offspring depending on which parenting style has been adopted by parents (Batool & Bond, 2014). Thus, it is important to study parenting styles in relation to behavioral and emotional components of adults' personality.

There is considerable evidence in research that responsiveness and sensitivity of parents towards child's feelings and emotions also play vital role in determining the children's emotional regulation and socialization skills (Aota, Fukunishi, Baba, Matsumori, & Iwai, 2011; Bowlby, 1969; Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, & McBride-Chang, 2002; Hussain & Ahmed, 2014; Pellerone, Tomasello, & Migliorisi, 2017; Roque & Verissimo, 2011; Sifneos, 1972). Alexithymia is a personality construct characterized by lack of empathy that hinders

their ability to build intimate and interpersonal relationships (Bagby, Taylor, & Parker, 1994; Pellerone, Tolini, & Polopoli, 2017). Khan (2017) conducted a research on the prevalence of alexithymia among general Pakistani adults and results revealed that alexithymia prevails in our society and men are more vulnerable (93%) than women (87%). Hence, it is a vital emotional component of adults' personality to study in relation with other prominent variables. Parenting styles adopted at home along with other factors determine the whole family environment. Childhood family environment is cardinal to the development of Alexithymia (Thorberg, Young, Sullivan, & Lyvers, 2011). Attachment theory emphasizes that child learns socialization by observing the relationships of his or her parents/guardians (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969). Thereupon, cordial family environment is vital to ensure emotional health of children (Lemche, Klann-Delius, Koch, & Joraschky, 2004; Pellerone, Formica, Lopez, Migliorisi, & Granà, 2017). Whilst, strict parenting contributes to the growth of insecure attachment (Pellerone et al., 2017). Such children may have poor emotional regulation (Tani, Pascuzzi, & Raffagnino, 2018), and high alexithymia (Pellerone et al., 2017).

Early adulthood is the phase of life characterized by major psychosocial development, where an adult undergoes many physiological and emotional changes. These changes often have multiple causes and are influenced by environmental and family factors. The results of this study may prove helpful in filling up the gap in the indigenous literature. The study aimed to highlight the behavioral and emotional components related to parenting styles. Thus, aggression and alexithymia were chosen as study variables. Further, findings of the study can help in spreading awareness and psycho-educating Pakistani society regarding incidence of aggression and alexithymia among young adults. It also highlights the importance of parenting especially during the tender years. Further based on the results, psychotherapies devised on Cognitive Behavior Modality may be designed for aggression prone individuals and their families and may be introduced at the grass root level starting as early at the basic foundation years at school. This study will also contribute to the growing literature on the role played by parenting styles in aggression and alexithymia exhibited by adults specially in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the relationship of parenting styles with aggression and alexithymia in emerging adults.

Hypotheses of the Study

- There would be significant positive relationship among parenting style (permissive), aggression and alexithymia in emerging adults.
- There would be significant negative relationship among parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative), aggression and alexithymia in emerging adults.

Method

Research Design

Cross-sectional research design was employed.

Sample

A purposive sample of 200 participants (women= 100; $M=21.58$; $SD=1.58$; men= 100; $M=21.87$; $SD=1.47$) with an age range between 18-29 years ($MA=21.72$; $SD=1.53$) was obtained. The sample was taken from four different educational institutions of Lahore including undergraduate students (95.5%) and post graduate students (4.5%).

Young adults of age above 18 years (Erickson, 1968) were targeted as emerging adults. University students, both undergraduates and post graduates, who live with both of the parents and can easily comprehend English were included in the study. All the tools were administered in English. All the participants of the study were able to easily understand the research questionnaire.

Assessment Measures

Demographic Form. A demographic form was developed to gather personal information related to age, gender, educational level and institution.

Parental Authority Questionnaire ([PAQ] ; Buri, 1991). PAQ, used to assess permissive, authoritarian and authoritative parenting prototype, is a 30 items questionnaire. The PAQ can be

administered on both or either parents as well as children of any age. PAQ is rated on a 5-point Likert Scale. The PAQ showed good internal consistency reliability for the present study: Mother's Permissiveness, Authoritarianism and Authoritativeness ($\alpha = .79$, $\alpha = .77$ & $\alpha = .86$) whereas Father's Permissiveness, Authoritarianism and Authoritativeness ($\alpha = .77$; $\alpha = .81$; $\alpha = .85$). The APQ has been used in various indigenous studies showing good validity and satisfactory internal consistency (Yasmin & Kiani, 2015).

Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire ([BPAQ] ; Bryant & Smith, 2001). BPAQ has four subscales including hostility, anger, physical aggression, and verbal aggression. It is rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The present study reported reasonably satisfactory internal consistency for all subscales: verbal aggression ($\alpha = .78$), hostility ($\alpha = .68$), physical aggression ($\alpha = .69$) and anger ($\alpha = .61$). The validity of this scale has been well established in the Pakistani context (Batool, 2013). BPAQ has been proved to be a valid tool to study the phenomenon of aggression (Bokhari, Rashid, & Ali, 2017; Khan, Fazaldad, Waheed, & Arif, 2017).

Toronto Alexithymia Scale ([TAS-20] ; Leising, Grande, & Faber, 2009). TAS-20 measures difficulty in identifying and describing feelings to others and tendency to have externally oriented thinking. A total of 5 items require reverse scoring. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The TAS-20 provides the following cut off scoring criteria: Non-alexithymia (scores less than 51), possible alexithymia (scores from 52-60) and alexithymia (scores above 61). Good internal consistency has been reported for the scale for the present study ($\alpha = .73$).

Procedure

First of all, the respective heads of all academic institutions were contacted and briefed about the nature of the study, further written permission was sought to conduct study at their institution. Participants were approached in university grounds, cafeterias and auditoriums. Moreover, the participants were also briefed about the present research. They were informed verbally and in writing that their information would be kept private. Moreover, written consent was taken from them. Further, they were also told about their right to leave

the study at any point in time. Overall administration of the research questionnaire took approximately 20-25 minutes.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Properties of Research Participants (N=200)

	N	M	SD	F
Age	200	21.73	1.53	
Gender	200	1.50	.50	
Male				100
Female				100
Education	200			
Undergraduates				191
Post-graduates				9

Note. N = number of participants, M = mean, SD = Standard Deviation, f=frequency.

Table 1 shows the demographic properties of research participants. This table suggests that the study has total 200 participants (MA=21.73, SD=1.53) including men ($n=100$) and women ($n=100$). Among the participants, 191 were in under-graduation and 9 were in post-graduation.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Major Study Variables in the Sample (N=200)

Variables	K	M	SD	α	Skewness
Perceived Permissive parenting					
Mother	10	30.48	7.20	.79	-.07
Father	10	30.06	6.73	.77	-.01
Perceived Authoritarian parenting					
Mother	10	31.09	7.41	.77	-.31
Father	10	30.92	7.12	.81	-.19
Perceived Authoritative parenting					
Mother	10	34.75	7.37	.86	-.64
Father	10	33.77	7.46	.85	-.41
Aggression	29	85.58	17.02	.84	-.39
Alexithymia	20	58.70	9.73	.73	-.29

Note. K = No of items; α = Cronbach's alpha; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 2 suggests that sample distributions are free of significant skewness values, i.e. all values fall within the acceptable range of ± 1 , indicating that distributions are approximately normal. Cronbach's alpha values evidence good reliability among scales and across subscales. Mean of Alexithymia i.e. 58.70 falls under the category of possible alexithymia and this value is consistent with other researches that studied the similar variable in Pakistani Population showing 61.35 mean in males and 57.89 in females (Zaidi, Mohsin, & Saeed, 2013).

Table 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Parenting Styles (Permissive, Authoritarian, Authoritative) and Aggression in Emerging Adults (N=200)

variables	<u>Permissive</u>		<u>Authoritarian</u>		<u>Authoritative</u>		Total aggression
	Mother 1	Father 2	Mother 3	Father 4	Mother 5	Father 6	
1	-	.79**	.06	.07	.25**	.16*	.16*
2		-	.10	.09	.15*	.18**	.18*
3			-	.81**	-.19**	-.19**	.36**
4				-	-.21**	-.18**	.32**
5					-	.77**	-.17*
6						-	-.21**
7							-

Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

Table 3 shows the relationship between parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian, authoritative) and aggression. Permissive parenting of both parents has significant positive correlation with aggression ($r_{(mother)} = .16, p < .05$; $r_{(father)} = .18, p < .05$). The correlation is significant but weak in magnitude. Authoritarian parenting style of both parents has significant positive correlation with aggression ($r_{(mother)} = .36, p < .01$; $r_{(father)} = .32, p < .01$). Whereas authoritative parenting of both parents is negatively correlated with aggression ($r_{(mother)} = -.17, p < .05$; $r_{(father)} = -.21, p < .01$). The correlation is significant but weak in magnitude.

Table 4

Parenting Styles and Aggression in Emerging Adults using Regression Analysis (N=200).

Parenting styles	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Model 1			
Age	-.88	.78	-.08
Gender	-6.92	2.37	-.20*
Model 2			
Permissive mother	.15	.26	.06
Permissive father	.33	.28	.13
Authoritarian mother	.63	.25	.27**
Authoritarian father	.11	.26	.05
Authoritative mother	.00	.24	.00*
Authoritative father	-.43	.23	-.19

Note. $R^2=.19$, $\Delta R^2=.16$, *B*= unstandardized coefficient, *SE*= standard error of unstandardized coefficient, β = standardized coefficient beta

** = $p < 0.01$, * = $p < 0.05$.

According to the results, gender, Authoritarian mother and Authoritative mother significantly predicted the aggression among their children.

Table 5

Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Parenting Styles (Permissive, Authoritarian, Authoritative) and Alexithymia in Emerging Adults (N=200)

variables	<u>Permissive</u>		<u>Authoritarian</u>		<u>Authoritative</u>		Total Alexithymia (students) 7
	Mother 1	Father 2	Mother 3	Father 4	Mother 5	Father 6	
1	-	.79**	.06	.07	.25**	.16*	.25**
2		-	.10	.09	.15*	.18**	.22**
3			-	.81**	-.19**	-.19**	.35**
4				-	-.21**	-.18**	.33**
5					-	.76**	-.17*
6						-	-.21**
7							-

Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

Table 5 shows the relationship between parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian, authoritative) and alexithymia. Permissive parenting of both parents has significant positive correlation with alexithymia ($r_{(mother)} = .25, p < .01$; $r_{(father)} = .22, p < .01$). Authoritarian parenting style of both parents has significant positive correlation with alexithymia ($r_{(mother)} = .35, p < .01$; $r_{(father)} = .33, p < .01$). Whereas, authoritative parenting of parents is negatively correlated with alexithymia ($r_{(mother)} = -.17, p < .05$; $r_{(father)} = -.21, p < .01$).

Table 6

Parenting Styles and Alexithymia in Emerging Adults using Regression Analysis (N=200).

Parenting styles	B	SE	β
<i>Model 1</i>			
Age	-.04	.45	-.01
Gender	-.53	1.4	-.03
<i>Model 2</i>			
Permissive mother	.33	.15	.24*
Permissive father	.06	.16	.04
Authoritarian mother	.28	.14	.21*
Authoritarian father	.13	.15	.09
Authoritative mother	-.07	.13	-.05
Authoritative father	-.21	.13	-.16

Note. $R^2 = .22$, $\Delta R^2 = .19$, B = unstandardized coefficient, SE B = standard error of unstandardized coefficient, β = standardized coefficient beta

* = $p < 0.05$.

Regression Analysis showed that age and gender are not significant predictors of alexithymia but permissive mother and Authoritarian mother parenting styles significantly predicted alexithymia in their next generation.

Discussion

The present investigation showed a significant positive relationship of permissive and authoritarian parenting style with aggression among emerging adults. Contrary to this, significant negative relationship was found between authoritative parenting style and aggression in the study participants. This implies that strict and

harsh dealing of parents and children's aggression are related to one another. Similarly, aggression prone children and parental carelessness are related with each other. Furthermore, gender, authoritarian mother and authoritative mother are strong predictor of aggression among emerging adults.

In line with the present findings, Alizade and Andries (2002) found that children who experience permissive parenting become aggressive and impulsive. These children lean towards defiance, dictatorship and autonomy, and therefore, do not show signs of responsibility or independence. Samuel and Ehrenreich (2014) also reported that parents practicing permissive parenting style might lead to aggression among children. It is believed that parents with permissive parenting do not monitor the activities of their children and they do not make their children think about their behaviors and misdoings. This, in turn, makes it difficult for children to understand their wrongdoings and regulate emotions, such as anger, accordingly.

On the similar lines, when parents treat their children with harshness and strictness (authoritarian), their children may also tend to develop aggression. In accord with the present findings, Beck, Daley, Hasting, and Stevenson (2004) found authoritarian parenting to be characterized by firm and restricted behavior, contributing to the increase in child's aggression. In Pakistan, collectivist culture is practiced where obedience is considered as a virtue culturally and religiously (Ispa et al., 2004). Harsh discipline is practiced to rebuke children, which at times results in conflict with the religion and children's expectations. It may be hypothesized that exposure to strict parenting makes a child susceptible to show aggression as a protest against their parents' strictness (Barnow, Lucht, & Freyberger, 2005). The present study also showed that as the parents become lucid and provide warmth and exert control on children, their children show less aggression. Consistent with our results, authoritative parenting has been linked with low levels of aggression among high school students (Moghaddam, Asli, Rakhshani, & Taravatmanesh, 2014).

A positive relationship between permissive and authoritarian parenting and alexithymia and a negative relationship between authoritative parenting style and alexithymia was also found. This implies that as parents become strict and harsh (authoritarian) in their dealing with children, it may become difficult for children to identify and express their feelings, making them more likely to experience

alexithymia. Other factors that can effect alexithymic tendencies among adults include: stressful experiences, stress, anxiety, and burnout (Obeid et al., 2019). Similarly, if the parents do not reflect on their children's behaviors (permissive) their children may develop alexithymia. Childhood adversities and poor parenting result in the impairment of emotional regulation and thus it is likely to cause alexithymia in a person (Karukivi & Saarijarvi, 2014). Thus, if parents exhibit alexithymia there are more chances that their children may also exhibit alexithymia.

In line with our present findings, Cuzzocrea, Barberis, Costa, and Larcan (2015) showed association between alexithymia and permissive parenting style in their sample of adolescents. Adequate parental monitoring about children's whereabouts and activities is a key factor for the better youth adjustment (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Parenting style is found to be one of the prime contributors in the poor emotional regulation in next generation which can lead to negative behavioral, emotional and social outcomes (Batool & Bond, 2014). Emotional recognition and expression of parents are vital in teaching children how to regulate emotions (Denham, Mitchell-Copeland, Strandberg, Auerbach, & Blair, 1997). In accord with the present research finding, Gatta et al., (2016) showed that parental alexithymia and perceived neglectful parenting (permissive) is positively linked with emotional disturbances among adolescents. Thorberg, Young, Sullivan, and Lyvers (2011) showed parental practices are related with alexithymia in children. Those children have poor emotional competence and overall worse social competence who are not exposed to emotional practices from parents (Denham et al., 1997).

Conclusion

The findings of the study highlight how parenting styles relate to different behavioral and emotional developmental consequences for the next generation. These results have important implications for the parents suggesting that they must practice authoritative parenting style as it relates negatively with aggression and alexithymia in their adult children. This may thus be hypothesized that the more authoritative parents are, the less aggressive their children are expected to be. Moreover, the less tendency for children to be alexithymic. The current findings therefore may be used to develop family intervention programs aimed at preventing aggression and alexithymia in adults.

Limitations and Future Implications

The present study has limited generalizability as the participants were engaged from only two educational institutes. As the assessment tools used in this research were in English, only bilingual individuals were recruited.

To overcome these limitations future researches must take larger representative sample focusing on a cross-sectional design. In future studies, Urdu language tools for assessment may be developed. Since the study included adult offspring only, future studies may take parental approach into account. This study fills the literature gap that exists in the researches of parenting styles in relation to emotional and behavioral problems in adulthood. The results of this research can be shared with parents to guide them to apply healthy child-rearing practices. The findings may call to design special programs targeted to promote positive parenting practices.

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