

Parenting Style and Empathy in School Going Children

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ABSTRACT

Background: Empathy in children is predicted by parenting style. It increases with warmth, support, and sensitivity of parents for their children's needs. In contrast, children have low empathy with parents playing authoritarian, strict, or punitive role. **Aim:** The study aims at evaluating the role of parenting style in developing empathy in children. **Methods:** Using random sampling technique, total 100 participants were selected of children going to school regularly. Tools used were socio-demographic data sheet, parents consent form, Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents (IECA) and Children's Perception of Parenting Scale. **Result:** Obtained result indicates high level of empathy in children who perceived their parents' parenting style as democratic and accepting. In addition, level of empathy was higher in girls in compare to boys. **Conclusion:** Results showed that parenting style is one of the predictors of level of empathy in children.

INTRODUCTION

It has long been proposed that parent-child relationships (particularly a child's perceptions of these relationships) play an important role in child adjustment and psychological development. A systematic review of parent-child interaction patterns has led to the identification of two primary dimensions of parental behaviour; one reflecting love versus hostility and the other reflecting autonomy versus control (Schaefer, 1965a). Children's perceptions of their parents' expectations, however, have received minimal attention. According to socialization theorists (Bandura, 1986), parents play an important role in promoting and fostering prosocial behaviours in their children and adolescents.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The influence of parenting on prosocial and antisocial behaviour has been well documented in prior research, particularly research on parenting styles and parental disciplinary practices. Prior researchers confirmed socialization models depicting parenting practices and social cognitions associated with prosocial behaviours. Recent reports of dramatic incidents of violence and aggression by adolescents have resulted in a resurgence of interest in understanding the correlates of prosocial and antisocial behaviours, especially with regard to the impact parents may have on those behaviours. However, little research has focused on processes underlying the link between parenting and these behaviours. Although positive child outcomes have been consistently associated with warm, responsive parenting and discipline strategies including parental inductions, we still have much to learn about the processes underlying the impact of parenting on children's empathetic behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

Aims: The study aims at evaluating the role of parenting style in developing empathy in children.

Objectives:

- To study the association between parenting style and empathy in school going children.
- To study the difference between empathy among boys and girls going to school.

Hypothesis:

- There will be no significant relationship between parenting style and empathy in school going children.
- There will be no significant difference in perceived parenting style by girls and boys going to school.
- There will be no significant difference between empathy among girls and boys going to school.

Research design: The study was a school based cross sectional study. The subjects were recruited for the study by purposive sampling technique.

Sample: Sample consists of total 100 participants (71 girls, 29 boys). Participants were selected from class 8th, 9th and 10th.

Inclusion criteria:

- Students attending school regularly.
- Students aged between 13 years to <18 years.
- Both boys and girls.
- Studying in standard 8th, 9th and 10th
- Students for whom parents gave consent for participating in the study.

Exclusion criteria:

- Any psychiatric disorder and physical illness.
- GHQ-12 score <3.

TOOLS TO BE USED

- Socio-demographic data sheet

It included various socio-demographic variables like age in years, years of education, domicile, number of family members, etc.

- General Health Questionnaire-12 (Goldberg & Williams, 1991)

Goldberg and Williams (1988) developed it. It is used to screen physical and mental health problems in the subjects and it consists of twelve items.

- Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents (IECA; Bryant, 1982)

IECA is questionnaire that intended to measure empathy in different situations with emotional connotations, an individual of the same or opposite sex being the character of the scene/item and also including neutral statements where empathy is expressed without a gender reference. It measures the emotional component of empathy. It consists of 22 items: Four with a female reference, four with a male reference and 14 without a specific reference. Answers were dichotomous (yes or no), high scores reflecting high empathy. The internal consistency analysis of Bryant's instrument (1982) showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.67, this value was higher with age.

- Children's Perception of Parenting Scale (CPPS; Pyari & Kalra, 1995)

The scale has been developed for school going children of ages 14 to 16 yrs. The scale consists of 44 items. The scale depicts six areas of children's of parental styles: Democratic, Autocratic, Accepting, Rejecting, Over protecting and Over demanding. The test-retest correlation was $r = .07$.

PROCEDURES

Total 100 samples of students studying in classes 8th, 9th and 10th were randomly selected from the school and after fulfilling the inclusion criteria but not the exclusion criteria were taken up for the study, after establishing rapport, a clinical interview was held. The school authority and parents were presented with informed consent and permission to conduct the study was taken. Necessary socio-demographic details were collected and then the General Health Questionnaire-12 was administered to rule out the presence of any physical and mental health problem. Then Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents (IECA) and Children's Perception of Parenting Scale was administered on the students.

RESULT

Table 1: Correlation between parenting style and empathy

Variables	Cognitive Empathy	Affective Empathy
Democratic	.248*	.194
Autocratic	-.070	-.036
Accepting	.202*	.205*
Rejecting	-.086	-.165
Over Protecting	.113	.093
Over Demanding	.126	.090

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Result indicates significant positive correlation between democratic and accepting parenting style with cognitive empathy of the participants, whereas there had been negative correlation between autocratic and rejecting parenting style and cognitive empathy of the participants. Further, the results show that there had been significant positive correlation between accepting parenting style and affective empathy and a negative correlation between autocratic and rejecting parenting style and affective empathy of the participants.

Table 2: Comparison of Parenting Style among Girls and Boys going to school

Variables	Girls		Boys		T (df=98)
	Mean (n=71)	SD	Mean(n=29)	SD	
Democratic	25.752	5.684	22.759	7.337	2.176*
Autocratic	24.479	6.640	26.380	4.460	1.414
Accepting	29.986	7.645	26.586	7.120	2.057*
Rejecting	19.282	5.119	18.862	4.801	.379
Over Protecting	23.929	5.243	22.862	5.235	.924
Over Demanding	23.958	5.798	24.276	5.561	.252

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results show significant difference between perceived parental style among girls and boys going to school on democratic and accepting areas. The findings suggest that boys are perceiving more democratic and accepting parental environment they are receiving from their parents than girls.

Table 3: Comparison of empathy in Girls and Boys going to school

Variables	Girls		Boys		T (df=98)
	Mean (n=71)	SD	Mean(n=29)	SD	
Cognitive Empathy	42.113	10.144	40.035	7.730	.991 NS
Affective Empathy	35.535	9.570	36.931	7.773	.697 NS

Results show no significant difference on both cognitive and affective domains of IECA among girls and boys going to school.

DISCUSSION

Results show that there had been 71 girls and 29 boys (100) in the study, out of which 24 were in class 8th, 32 in 9th and 24 in 10th. Students (mean age = 14.2 years, SD = 1.6), 75 students were living with their parents and 25 were not living with their parents. 56 students belonged to Hindu religion, 19 were Muslims and 25 followed other religions.

Study result found a positive correlation between democratic and accepting parenting style with cognitive empathy of the school going children, and negative correlation between autocratic and rejecting parenting style and cognitive empathy of the school going children. Result findings show that there had been significant positive correlation between accepting parenting style and affective empathy and a negative correlation between autocratic and rejecting parenting style and affective empathy of the school going children. Results also indicate a positive correlation between democratic parenting

style and affective empathy in school going children though the findings dose not indicates a significant relationship. Findings of the present study had been supported by prior research findings of Carlo et al. (2010), and Nasvytienė (2005).

Findings indicated that boys were receiving more democratic and accepting parenting in compare to girls who received a slight more autocratic and rejecting parenting environment. Results of the present study suggest no significant difference between girls and boys going to school on cognitive and affective empathy. The results found are contradictory to studies conducted by Carlo et al. (2003), Eisenberg & Lennon (1983) and Hoffman (1977). One reason could be the cultural variances between the studies.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the study concludes that there is a positive relationship between perceived democratic and accepting parenting style and empathic behaviors in school going children. Though, girls seems to be more empathic than boys, still a loving and caring environment provided by parents helps in developing empathic behavior in children.

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