

Authoritarian Parenting, Emotional Regulation and Mental Health: Students in Perspective

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Abstract: Child rearing strategies have vital impact on child's emotional and psychological development, authoritarian parenting, can be defined as child rearing practices that demands high and low emotional warmth, and it is linked with unfavorable outcomes. Current study explored the association among authoritarian parenting, psychological well-being and emotional regulation of university students. 250 participants were approached by using convenient sampling technique. Parenting Styles Questionnaire by Edward & Fabella (2022), Emotion Regulation Questionnaire by Gross & John (2003), and Psychological Well-being Questionnaire by Ryff (1995) were used for data collection. Result showed that students who scored high on authoritarian parenting showed lower psychological well-being and poor emotional regulation. Students with authoritarian parenting styles were found to use suppression strategies more frequently than reappraisal strategies. This research highlights the need for interventions aimed at improving emotional regulation and psychological well-being, particularly among those raised in authoritarian environments.

Keywords: Authoritarian Parenting, Psychological Wellbeing, Emotional Regulation

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Introduction

The act of raising a child to adulthood or providing for them is known as parenting. The formation of an adult's character is significantly influenced by their parenting. An individual's social and intellectual functioning may be impacted by their early experiences. Emotions are a mental state brought on by psychological circumstances that have the power to alter our actions. Numerous psychological issues, including worry, tension, preventive measures, and mental affronts, may result from this. Johnson defines emotional stability as having the capacity to handle life's challenges and feel empathy for others. A person who is emotionally stable is able to adapt to changing circumstances without exhibiting strong emotional reactions.

Children's whole development is primarily the responsibility of their parents (Zahed et al., 2016). Through their interaction with parents, parents have a significant impact on children's psychological health (Francisco et al., 2020). An individual's psychological health and academic achievement are significantly influenced by the parenting style that their parents employ to raise their children (Rauf & Ahmed, 2017).

The idea that children need adult protection and direction and should receive the best parenting possible based on their developmental stage has been promoted to parents, educators, health experts, and welfare workers in modern times. This illustrates how broadly acknowledged the connection between the welfare of children today and in the future is. Consequently, a great deal of empirical research analyzing the impact of early parenting on subsequent

mental health has been published in the field of social psychology (Santrock, [2007](#); McKinney et al., [2011](#); McLeod et al., [2007](#)).

Young persons raised by authoritarian parents are more likely to experience unfavorable results, including internalized and externalized issues, as well as a decline in their social and emotional development (Batool, 2020). In an authoritarian parenting style, the parent establishes and upholds the rules without consulting the child. In contrast to the other two parenting philosophies; parents who choose this approach typically exhibit less love toward their kids and have tight control over their conduct and attitudes (Bornstein et al., [2011](#); Daniel & McLeod, [2017](#)).

An authoritarian parenting approach is typically less caring and involves high standards along with little leeway for the children (Sanvictores & Mendez, [2021](#)).

Mental Health

Mental health encompasses a person's overall mental state or psychological wellbeing including factors such as happiness, satisfaction with life, and the absence of mental health issues. It reflects a state of flourishing and optimal functioning across various domains of life (Szcześniak et al., [2022](#)). The authoritarian parenting style has been found to be related to lower psychological well-being as it was negatively correlated with hope and positively correlated with externalized behavior problems (Akhtar et al., [2011](#); Huppert, [2009](#)).

Children's whole development is primarily the responsibility of their parents (Zahed et al., 2016). Through their interaction with parents, parents have a significant impact on children's psychological health (Fong et al., [2019](#)). An individual's psychological health and academic achievement are significantly influenced by the parenting style that their parents employ to raise their children. Patterns of early parenting can enormously affect the social, emotional and psychological development of the child. The child comes to view the world and their own abilities or strengths from the eyes of the parents, thereby making this relationship of vital importance (Horstman et al., [2016](#)).

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation refers to the capacity to comprehend, manage, and express emotions appropriately. It encompasses skills like recognizing emotions, controlling impulses, and adapting to situational demands (Gross, [2014](#)). Emotion regulation contains the strategies individuals employ to manage their emotions' frequency, valence (positive and negative nature), and intensity, determining how and when these emotions are expressed (Gross, [2014](#)). It contains the appraisal and suppression of positive and negative emotions based on regulation-related strategies. Emotion regulation is adaptable to an individual's immediate objectives, serving to diminish, maintain, or mitigate sensations of both positive and negative emotions as needed (Webb, [2018](#)).

Undergraduate students who experience hardship or passive interpersonal connections and who are unable to control their emotions for an extended period of time may be at risk for emotional illnesses that compromise their mental and physical well-being. Irreversible outcomes like suicide and antisocial conduct will be produced in more severe circumstances, whereas people who are able to apply emotion regulation techniques effectively and flexibly typically have better interpersonal relationships and social adaptability (Lane, et al., [2021](#)). It is often acknowledged that healthy parental practices and strong teacher-student relationships in schools are key factors in the development of emotion control in teenagers (Garaigordobil, [2020](#)). Numerous studies have shown a clear correlation between parenting practices and children's ability to regulate their emotions. Emotions like distress can affect children's internalizing emotions, even though parental response to negative emotions has an impact on children's ability to regulate emotion (Eisenberg et al., [1999](#)). Additional research indicates that adolescents who experience authoritarian parenting may have higher rates of internalizing and externalizing issues as well as lower psychological well-being (García & Gracia, [2009](#); Lamborn et al., [1991](#)).

Method

Hypotheses

1. Authoritarian parenting style will have negative association with psychological well-being and emotional Regulation (Reappraisal) among university students.



2. Authoritarian parenting style will have positive association with emotional regulation (suppression).
3. There will be gender difference on study variables.

Research Design

In this research study, cross sectional survey was used to gather the information about various variables. The study was conducted in different universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The period of the study was about 4 months from Oct 2023 to January 2024.

Sample Size

The convenient sampling was carried out for the selection of the participants. Sample of two hundred and fifty (n=250) were selected from university, with the ages above 20 years. Following inclusion and exclusion criteria data were collected from the participants.

Instruments/Tools

Psychological Wellbeing Scale. The Psychological Wellbeing Scale developed by Ryff, (1989) is an assessment tool designed to measure various dimensions of psychological well-being.

Emotional regulation scale. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), developed by Gross and John (2003), was formulated to assess two distinct emotion regulation strategies. One is Cognitive Reappraisal, and the other is Expressive Suppression. The internal consistency of the Reappraisal subscale, measured using Cronbach's alpha, was .85, while for the Suppression subscale, it was .82.

Authoritarian parenting scale. The Authoritarian Parenting Scale is an assessment tool designed to measure the authoritarian dimension of parenting. It evaluates how much a parent emphasizes strict discipline, high demands, and low responsiveness to their child's emotional needs. The reliability of the scale is $\alpha = .70$. This scale was recently used by Edward in 2022.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed with informed consent to the participants, who were university students. Under the supervision of the researchers, the questionnaires were administered during a specified time period. The participation of the participants was voluntary and confidential, and their identities were protected. No rewards or compensation were provided for completing the questionnaires. The researchers explained the study objectives and the method for completing the scales to the participants. Completing the scales took approximately 10-15 minutes. After collecting the completed scales from the participants, the researchers scored them and then codified the scores for statistical analysis. Once the data were collected from the sample, the analysis was conducted using the SPSS program.

Table 1

Correlation for Study Variables (N = 250)

Variables	PWBR	ERRS	ERS	AP
PWBR	1	.17**	.24**	-.58**
ERRS		1	.61**	-.15*
ERS			1	-.17**
AP				1

Note: PS=Authoritarian parenting, PWB= Psychological Wellbeing, ER= Emotional Regulation

The table presents the correlation relationships between Parenting Style (PS), Psychological Well-Being (PWBR), and Emotional Reappraisal (ERRS) and Suppression (ERS). Significant positive correlations are observed between PWBR, and both ERRS and ERS, suggesting that higher psychological well-being is associated with better use of emotional regulation strategies. Additionally, a strong positive correlation exists between ERRS and ERS, indicating that these



two forms of emotional regulation are closely related and often increase together. In contrast, AP shows a negative correlation with PWBR, ERRS, and ERS, implying that higher authoritarian parenting tendencies are linked to lower psychological well-being and less effective emotional regulation strategies.

Table 2

Independent Sample t Test on the Basis of Gender on Study Variables (N = 250)

Variable	Male (n=121)		Female (n= 129)		t	P	95 % CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
PWBR	59.8	7.7	47.4	10.5	9.2	.000	8.9	15.0	1.2
ERRS	18.3	4.0	15.8	10.5	4.5	.000	1.5	3.7	0.8
ERS	13.3	3.1	11.1	3.4	4.3	.000	1.0	3.1	0.7
AP	21.2	6.6	24.7	8.2	2.4	.002	-5.3	-1.5	0.5

*p<.05. **p<.01, M=mean; SD=standard deviation; t=t statistics; p=significant value; LL=lower limit; UL=upper limit.

This table presents the comparison between male and female participants across various variables: Psychological Well-Being (PWBR), Emotional Regulation (Reappraisal ERRS and Suppression ERS), as well as Parenting Style (AP). Results indicate significant gender differences on all variables. Males show higher scores than females in PWBR, ERRS, and ERS, suggesting they report greater psychological well-being and more frequent use of emotional regulation strategies. In contrast, females score higher on AP, indicating a stronger tendency towards authoritarian parenting.

Discussion

The hypothesis suggesting there will be a negative association of authoritarian parenting on emotional Regulation and Psychological Well-being among university students. Authoritarian parenting on emotional regulation and psychological well-being, highlighting the importance of promoting authoritative or supportive parenting styles that foster autonomy and emotional competence in children for their long-term mental health and well-being. These results were supported by Pinquart and Kauser (2018) meta-analysis, which concluded that authoritarian parenting was consistently associated with increased psychological distress and decreased overall well-being in children and adolescents across a variety of cultural contexts.

Findings depict that there has been continuous association between authoritarian parenting and low level of psychological well-being including self-esteem and high ratio of stress. Results of current study are consistent with these findings. Wang et al. (2023) found that children having upbringing with authoritarian parenting style have greater level of stress, gloominess and physical discomfort. Gaspar et al. (2022) also have cross-cultural findings of consistency between authoritarian parenting to poorer levels of children's self-esteem, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being.

Implications

According to Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969), high demands and low responsiveness often leads to insecure attachment. So, the current study can be a good addition for developmental field of Psychology. Diverse cultural findings in context of developmental and psychological theories can depict comprehensive framework in perceptive of psychological outcomes of various parenting strategies. Current study implies practical steps for educational settings to apply psychological services to improve emotional health. These services can help students to adopt effective coping, which techniques to reduce stress of like academic pressure and overall mental health.

Limitations

A large proportion of the research on these types of topics is based on self-report measures, which are prone to biasness so, longitudinal study may help more. Moreover, sample of current study is not large enough, large sample can increase generalizability.



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