

Parenting Style and Control Practices in Hisar

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ABSTRACT To explore parenting style and control practices, 178 mothers and 149 fathers of 4 to 6 years old children were interviewed. The results indicated parent gender and sex of child differences in parental control practices. Compared to mothers, fathers were more firm and lax in their control. Mothers on the other hand, observed more harsh control. Parents used more firm and harsh control with their sons than daughters. Compared to less educated parents, more educated parents were more likely to use firm control and were less likely to use harsh and lax control. More educated parents had higher expectations for mature behaviour. With increase in children's age harsh control increased and lax control decreased. Also with increase in children's age, expectations for mature behaviour increased.

INTRODUCTION

Baumrind (1973, 1977) classified parents as belonging to one of the three parenting styles authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Authoritarian parents tend to be highly controlling and are less likely than other parents to use reasoning and explanation. They value obedience to authority and use harsh methods to control their children's behaviour. Authoritative parents are also high in control but their demands are developmentally appropriate. They are also warm and affectionate and use reasoning and explanation with their children. Permissive parents exercise little control over their children, are nondemanding, but are generally warm and affectionate. The nature of parental control is a highly salient dimension of parental behaviour which has important implications for children's development.

The ways in which parents provide guidance to their children through their disciplinary techniques and control strategies are influential in children's behaviour. These disciplinary strategies are embedded within the styles of parenting

described by Baumrind (1973, 1977). Brody and Shaffer (1982) provides three general categories of parental discipline. These include power assertion, love withdrawal and induction. Power assertive parents use commands and physical power to control children's behaviour. In love withdrawal discipline, the child is threatened with the loss of parental love. While parents who use inductive discipline provide reasons and explanations to their children for particular behaviours.

In India, Sinha (1984) and Gupta and Gupta (1985) reported that there have been changes in patterns of parenting behaviour from authoritarian discipline to more permissive and less harsh methods. The traditional use of physical punishment as a disciplinary method is decreasing although it has not been given up completely. Saraswathi and Sundaresan (1980) examined perceived maternal disciplinary methods in relation to the moral development of children and found that there was a higher use of power assertion discipline than induction.

The aims of this study were to examine the similarities and differences in maternal and paternal control practices, expectations for mature behaviour and parenting style in Hisar, India.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

In Hisar city, a number of schools were approached and permission was obtained for participation of the families involved with those schools. Information sheets regarding the research project were sent to families whose children were aged 4 to 6 years and both the parents were requested for participation. Parents of 178 children agreed to participate in the research

project. finally, 178 mothers and 149 fathers subsequently participated in the research.

A higher proportion of fathers (77.2%) were university educated. Of the mothers, 44.4% were university educated and 38.8% were middle to high school educated. Almost all the fathers (97%) were working full time. Of the mothers, 26 % were in full-time employment and 65% were home managers.

The mean age of target children was 65 months ($SD = 6.59$ months). The mean age of mothers was 30 years ($SD = 4.01$ years) and fathers was 35 years ($SD = 4.57$ years).

Measures

Parenting Style and Practices: Parenting beliefs and practices were measured using the questionnaires developed by Greenberger and her colleagues (1988) which focused on common dimensions of parenting style. Parents were requested to rate the frequency of their control practices and expectations on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). Component scores calculated for parental control and parental expectations for mature behaviour. The median scores used in this classification process were obtained from the scores of the same groups-mothers and fathers. Based on the scores from measures of parental control and for maturity demands, parents were classified into authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting styles and a "mixed" type (authoritative/authoritarian). The parental control scale specifically measured the frequency of harsh, lax and firm disciplinary methods that parents use with children. Both the parents were personally interviewed and the interviews took place in the family home.

RESULTS

First, the results of multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) are presented to examine the differences for parent gender and sex of child on parental control and parental expectations for maturity in child behaviour. Then, the frequency distributions of parenting style categories are presented.

Parental Control Practices: A two-way MANOVA was performed using parent gender

(mothers, fathers) and sex of child (male, female) as independent variables and parental control (firm, harsh, lax) as the dependent variables. This was followed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs), alpha set at .05. F statistics for Wilk's Lambda are reported. The main effects for parent gender and sex of child were significant, $F_s(3,303) = 16.22$ and 3.70 , respectively, $p_s = .000$ and $.01$, respectively. There was no significant interaction between parent gender by sex of child, $F(3,303) = .22$, $p = .89$.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations on parental control measure

Measured Variables	Mothers		Fathers	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Firm control*	48.49	5.16	51.51	5.39
Harsh control*	59.41	6.46	56.18	9.34
Lax control*	49.06	5.33	52.61	7.68
	Sons		Daughters	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Firm control**	50.45	5.61	49.33	5.29
Harsh control**	58.99	4.12	56.88	6.23
Lax control	50.62	5.28	50.79	5.51

Note: Means differ significantly at * $p < .001$, ** $p < .05$

For the effect of parent gender, univariate F -tests were significant for firm control, $F(1,305) = 26.46$, $p = .000$; harsh control, $F(1,305) = 11.44$, $p = .001$; and lax control $F(1,305) = 24.25$, $p = .000$. As presented in Table 1, fathers were more firm ($M = 51.51$) than mothers ($M = 48.49$). For harsh control, mothers were more harsh ($M = 59.41$) than fathers ($M = 56.18$). For lax control, fathers were more lax ($M = 52.61$) than mothers ($M = 49.06$).

For the sex of child, univariate F -tests were significant for firm control, $F(1,303) = 4.46$, $p = .03$ and harsh control, $F(1,303) = 6.84$, $p = .009$. As presented in table 1, parents were more firm and harsh for their sons ($M_s = 50.45$ and 58.99 , respectively) than their daughters ($M_s = 49.33$ and 56.88 , respectively).

Correlations were also run to examine associations between firm, harsh, lax control and age of children; and firm, harsh, lax control and education of parents. As presented in table 2, although marginal, positive correlations existed between the age of children and harsh control,

Table 2: Correlations between children's age, parents' education and parental control and maturity demand sub-scales

	Parental Control		
	Firm	Harsh	Lax
Children's age	.11	.18**	-.10
Parents' education	.21*	-.12	-.09
Maturity demands			
	Independent	Prosocial	Self-control
Children's age	.19**	.21**	.23*
Parents' education	.17**	.20**	.19**

Note: * $p < .005$, ** $p < .01$

$r = .18$, $p = .02$. A negative trend was observed between lax control and age of children, $r = -.10$, $p > .05$. These results suggest that with increase in children's age, harsh control increases and lax control decreases. Marginal positive correlations were also found between firm control and education of parents, $r = .21$, $p = .002$. There was negative trend between harsh control and education of parents, and between lax control and education of parents. The suggests that with increase in education harsh and lax control decrease.

Maturity Demands: A two-way MANOVA was also performed, using parent gender (mothers, fathers) and sex of child (male, female) as independent variables and parental expectations for mature behaviour (self-control behaviour, independent behaviour, prosocial behaviour) as dependent variables. This was followed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The main effects for parent gender and sex of child were not significant, $F_s(3,316) = 1.85$ and $.80$, respectively, $p = .49$, respectively. Interactions between parent gender by sex of child was also not significant, $F(3, 316) = .81$, $p = .49$.

Correlations were also run to examine associations between maturity demand sub-scales (demand for independent, prosocial and self-control behaviours) and education of parents. As shown in table 2, positive correlations existed between age of children and expectations for independent, prosocial and self-control behaviours, $r_s = .19$, $.21$ and $.23$ respectively, $p_s = .01$, $.001$ and $.000$, respectively. These results indicate that with increase in children's age, demands for mature behaviour increased. Marginal positive correlations were also found between demands for independent, prosocial and self-con-

trol behaviours and education of parents, $r_s = .17$, $.20$ and $.19$ respectively, $p_s = .04$, $.01$ and $.04$ respectively. This suggests that with increase in parental education, maturity demands increased.

Parenting Style Categories: Parents were classified into different parenting style categories by cross-classifying the parents' scores on the Maturity Demands and Parental control measures. Among the participants, 63% of the mothers and 63% of the fathers who participated in this study could be categorised. The frequencies and percentage distributions of parenting style categories are presented in table 3. A high proportion of parents fell into the permissive category. A high proportion of fathers (42.6%) were classified as "mixed" (authoritarian/authoritative). More mothers were authoritarian than fathers.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of parenting style categories

Parenting style categories	Mothers $n = 112$ (%)	Fathers $n = 94$ (%)
Permissive	38 (33.9)	31 (33.0)
Mixed	29 (25.9)	40 (42.6)
Authoritarian	25 (22.3)	13 (13.8)
Authoritative	20 (17.9)	10 (10.6)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages
 $\chi^2 = 11.8$, $df(3)$, $p < .01$

Chi-square was computed to examine the parent gender differences in parental style categories. There were significant differences in two groups $\chi^2(3, n = 206) = 8.08$, $p < .04$.

DISCUSISON

In this study it was found that fathers used higher levels of firm and lax control than did mothers. In contrast, mothers reported using more harsh control. The finding that mothers were more harsh in control than fathers, is also evident from the Indian literature. Joshi and Tiwari (1977) report that, in middle-class families mothers are more punitive. Singh, et al. (1987) report that mothers are more likely to express aggression toward their children than towards their husband. Within Indian tradition, the perceived superiority of the husband makes him an inappropriate object of aggression. Children, on the other hand, are an easy target of anger and frustration. Saraswathi and Sundaresan (1980)

explored perceived maternal disciplinary methods in relation to the moral development of their children and found that there was a higher usage of power assertion. In relation to disciplinary techniques used at home, more recently, Balda and Irving (in press) also found that compared to fathers, mothers were likely to use verbal reprimand and physical punishment.

The finding that fathers were more firm in their control than mothers is consistent with previous research in India. Singh et al. (1987) reported that Hindu fathers used inductive discipline to control their children. Although the religion of the parents was not examined in the present study, most of the families were Hindu. Roopnarine, and Ahmeduzzaman (1989) also reported that fathers are the chief disciplinarians in India and through guidance encourage their development. Balda and Irving (in press) also found that compared to mothers, fathers were more likely to use induction style of disciplining children.

That parents were more firm and harsh with their sons than daughters is also consistent with literature. Bhogle (1991) found that both mothers and fathers were more likely to be permissive with girls than boys. In a recent rural study, Punia (1994) reports that mothers use different disciplinary techniques for boys and girls. They believe that as boys are more destructive, they need physical punishment. Bronstein (1994) also reports that parents tend to use different control techniques for sons and daughters.

Education of the parents appeared to have a significant impact on parental control practices. Compared to less educated parents, more educated parents were less likely to use harsh and lax control and were more likely to use firm control. These results are in accordance with previous research (e.g., Balda and Irving, in press; Najman, et al., 1994).

That younger the age of child and lower the frequency of harsh parental control and greater the frequency of lax parental control, gets support from Bhogle (1990) who reports that mothers were more likely to have permissive attitudes toward their young children.

With regard to demands for mature behaviour, more educated parents had higher expectations for mature behaviour. One of the reason might be as observed by Verma and Ghandially

(1985) that more educated parents perceive their children's future life as more demanding and challenging and therefore start training their children for independence at an early age.

Parents did not differentiate between sons and daughters for their expectations for mature behaviour. These findings are consistent with previous literature. Verma and Ghandially (1985) found that the mothers did not differentiate between boys and girls in the number of demands they placed on their children.

In conclusion, mothers used more harsh control, whereas, fathers used more firm and lax control. More educated parents were less likely to use harsh and lax control. Also more educated parents had higher expectations for mature behaviour. Parents were more likely to be harsh and firm with their sons than daughters. Parents did not differentiate between sons and daughters for mature behaviour.

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