

WILL THE CHOICE OF PARENTING STYLE BE AFFECTED BY PARENTS' SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF PERCEPTION OF CONTROL

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Abstract

Previous studies have widely explored the impacts of different parenting styles on children's developmental outcomes. Authoritative parenting is generally regarded as supportive and nurturing to children's psychological well-being. The concept of "control" is one of the important topics in the study of parenting. Previous studies mainly focused on the impacts of parental control over child discipline. However, the amount of research exploring the association between parental perceived controllability in their parenting practice and the choice of parenting styles is rare. The purpose of this study was to fill up this gap. A total of 157 parents participated in this survey, including 38 fathers and 119 mothers. The mean age of their children was 4.67. Three constructs were designed as independent variables to measure parental attributes on control, including parental efficacy, parental self-control, and parental perceived controllability over their children. This study was conducted within the context of the pandemic situation in which parents allowed their children and themselves to use mobile phones during the pandemic. Parental efficacy was measured by a one-item scale, as proposed by Bandura (2016), which was "How much can you do to control the time your child spends". The lack of parents' self-control was measured by studying how frequently they used their mobile phones with absent-mindedness. Parental perceived controllability was measured by parents' expected time consumption on a mobile phone by their child minus the exact time consumed in their mobile phone usage. The bigger the positive difference represented, the stronger parent's perceived controllability over child discipline. The result showed that the practice of the authoritative parenting style was significantly predicted by parental self-efficacy ($\beta=0.239$, $p=0.003$) and perceived controllability ($\beta=0.154$, $p=0.050$). However, the practice of authoritarian parenting style was predicted by a lack of self-control ($\beta=0.423$, $p<0.001$) and lack of perceived controllability ($\beta=-0.159$, $p=0.030$) but not parental self-efficacy ($\beta=0.031$, $p=0.670$). Similarly, for the practice of the permissive parenting style, it was predicted by a lack of self-control ($\beta=0.477$, $p<0.001$), and a lack of perceived controllability ($\beta=-0.178$, $p=0.011$). It implies that parents with authoritative parenting styles seem to have more internal resources for exercising appropriate parental control in child discipline than parents with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Perhaps, these parents may express their difficulty in exercising control in parenting in different ways. Recommendations for future parent education on learning "parental control" will be discussed.

Keywords: *Parenting style, parental self-efficacy, self-control, perceived controllability.*

1. Introduction

Parenting has long been a focus of study among different professionals, for example, psychologists, educators, psychotherapists, sociologists, and social workers. While child development is one of the significant concerns in child-rearing, whether parenting is effective will directly determine the qualities of child development outcomes.

In the study of parenting, scholars from different disciplines may have different focuses. For example, psychologists or psychiatrists might emphasize the association between parents' mental health and the parenting process and its impacts on child development outcomes (Tungpunkom et al., 2017). Social workers might focus more on studying the impact of parenting practices or parenting beliefs on child development (Zuar et al., 2021). The topic of parenting styles is a core focus of exploration that has been widely studied. Previous research supported the claim that parents learn the practice of parenting style through intergenerational transmission (He et al., 2020; O'Brien, 2010). In other words, parents learn their parenting styles through their observation and influence from their parents at the time of their childhood experiences, which may become their later parenting styles and practices. That is, parents with

authoritarian parenting practices have their parents with an authoritarian parenting style. However, one may wonder if intergenerational transmission may be the only explanation. This study is to fill up the research gap by exploring what may be other factors to explain parents' choice of which parenting style to practice.

2. Literature review

2.1. Parenting Style and parental self-control

Baumrind (1967) initially developed a three-model parenting style that combines the strategies, behaviors, and attitudes parents apply in child-rearing. Baumrind (1967) proposed two different dimensions in the process of parenting. They are responsive and demandingness. Based on this categorization, she defined three parenting styles: authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting, and permissive parenting. Authoritative parenting is described as a way of parenting in which parents are both responsive and demanding. Parents with an authoritative parenting style usually care about their children's needs, show parental warmth to their children, and set rules with clear explanations and mutual agreement with the child (Santroc, 2007). Authoritative parents allow their children autonomy and encourage them to explore and learn independence. However, authoritarian parents have high parental demands but low responsiveness. They set strict rules with high standards but little negotiation or explanations. The parenting process involves very little parental warmth and little communication with the child but is very controlling and demanding. Punishment is often the practice in case of disobedience to control their child's behaviors. Permissive parenting is characterized as highly responsive but not demanding. In other words, permissive parents are nurturing and warm. They involve with their child's activities and want to be children's friends. However, there are no rules to let their child follow. The expectation of their child is relatively low, and they barely exercise any discipline to control or regulate their child's behaviors. Previous researchers have recognized that parenting styles are correlated with some psychological or behavioral characteristics (Berge, 2010; DeHart et al., 2006; Park & Walton-Moss, 2012; Sarwar, 2016). A previous study reported that an authoritative parenting style strongly predicted positive outcomes in child behaviors (Schary, 2012). On the other hand, some other studies reported that the authoritarian parenting style was positively associated with controlling parenting (Chao, 1994), and it negatively predicted the children's executive control (Zhang, Yan, Nan & Cai, 2021). However, research on studying the association between parental self-control and parenting style is scarce.

2.2. Parental Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in how well or poorly he or she will handle a specific task based on his ability (Bandura, 1989). The more self-efficacy an individual holds, the more likely he or she will achieve the desired outcome. Parental efficacy can be defined as the "beliefs or judgments a parent holds of their capabilities to organize and execute a set of tasks related to parenting a child" (de Montigny & Lacharité, 2005). Efficacious parents have strong confidence in influencing their child's behavior. They will put more effort into meeting their expectations and persist when meeting obstacles (Bandura, 1999). On the contrary, parents with lower efficacy in a given situation will put less effort. Previous research also supported a negative association between a lower level of parental efficacy belief and a higher level of authoritarian parenting practice with less easygoing parental behaviors (Evans et al., 2012). Therefore, it may be the situation that parents who have a relatively lower level of parental efficacy belief will be more likely to choose an authoritarian parenting style to discipline their child to make sure their child's behaviors are under control.

2.3. Parental perceived controllability

Parental control is one of the core dimensions of parenting practice. Parents with authoritarian parenting style practices were more likely to have more parental control over their children, although the related studies are rare (Cuzzocrea et al., 2015). On the one hand, it is essential to believe that parents who intend to socialize their children need to use authority and provide discipline. However, what will happen to parents if they perceive their parental authority and disciplinary power are not strong enough to socialize their children to behave? A study reported that parents with authoritarian parenting styles added restrictive parental control in the child-rearing style to reduce delinquency in their children (Pezzella, Thornberry & Smith, 2016). Because of this, it predicts that parents with a lower level of perceived controllability may execute more parental control over their children to prevent or reduce negative external misbehaviors, such that it may make them more likely to practice authoritarian parenting style in practice.

This study aims to fill up the research gap in which it explores the associations among four different variables, i.e., parenting styles, parental self-control, parental efficacy, and parental perceived controllability in parenting. Previous research to study these four constructs is rare. Therefore, there are two hypotheses in this study.

- (1) It predicts that parents who practice an authoritative parenting style will have more internal resources on parental attributes on control, such as parental self-efficacy, parental self-control, and parental perceived controllability.
- (2) It predicts that parents who practice an authoritarian parenting style will have fewer internal resources on parental attributes on control, such as parental self-efficacy, parental self-control, and parental perceived controllability.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Parents of children aged 3-6 years old were recruited as participants from an English Training Institution. A total of 159 parents were invited to complete the questionnaires, but only 157 participants provided valid data. Among these 157 parents, 38 (24.2%) were fathers, and 119 (75.8%) were mothers. All of them had a lone child in their families. Among these 157 families, 87(55.4%) of the participants' children were boys, and 70 (44.6 %) of their children were girls. Children's age ranged from 3 to 6 years old, with 4.68 years as the mean age.

3.2. Measurements

3.2.1. Dependent Variable: Parenting Style. Parenting Style and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ)-Short Form was used to measure parents' parenting styles (Robinson et al.,2001). The short version of PSDQ has 32 items to group parents into three parenting styles using a five-point Likert scale (1= never, 5=always). The authoritarian parenting style comprises 12 items and three dimensions: verbal hostility, punishment, and physical coercion. The authoritative parenting style comprises 15 items and three dimensions: support and affection, regulation, and autonomy. The permissive styles are measured by 5 items in one dimension, indulgence. The scores for all items under each dimension were added up and averaged to get the score for that dimension. Similarly, the dimensions' scores for each parenting style were added and averaged to get the score for that parenting style. The higher scores on a particular parenting style represented the style of parenting practice that the participant most likely used in parenting.

3.2.2. Independent Variables. The constructs as independent variables measured parental attributes on control, including parental efficacy, parental self-control, and parental perceived controllability over their children. This study was conducted within the context of the pandemic in which parents allowed their children and themselves to use mobile phones during the pandemic. Parental efficacy was measured by a one-item scale, as proposed by Bandura (2016), which was "How much can you do to control the time your child spends". The lack of parents' self-control was measured by studying how frequently they used their mobile phones with absent-mindedness. Parental perceived controllability was measured by parents' expected time consumption on a mobile phone by their child minus the exact time consumed in their child's mobile phone usage. The more significant the positive difference, the stronger it represented the parent's perceived controllability over child discipline.

4. Findings

The results supported all hypotheses. By putting authoritative parenting style as the predictor and parental self-efficacy, perceived controllability, and parental self-control as independent variables, the results generated by running a linear regression showed that the practice of authoritative parenting style was significantly predicted by parental self-efficacy ($\beta=0.239$, $p=0.003$) and perceived controllability ($\beta=0.154$, $p=0.050$), but not parental self-control. However, if an authoritarian parenting style replaced the predictor, the practice of authoritarian parenting style was predicted by lack of self-control ($\beta=0.423$, $p<0.001$) and lack of perceived controllability ($\beta=-0.159$, $p=0.030$) but not parental self-efficacy ($\beta=0.031$, $p=0.670$). Similarly, for the practice of a permissive parenting style, it was predicted by a lack of self-control ($\beta=0.477$, $p<0.001$) and a lack of perceived controllability ($\beta=-0.178$, $p=0.011$). In other words, the results showed that parents with the practice of authoritative parenting styles seemed to own more internal resources, such as self-efficacy and perceived controllability, in exercising appropriate parental control in child discipline than parents in authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. The parents with the practice of authoritarian parenting style were those lacking these internal resources. Perhaps, these parents may express their difficulty in exercising control in parenting in different ways.

5. Discussion

Most of the previous research on parenting styles was mainly to study their influences on the outcomes in child development. Among this focus of studies, most findings supported the authoritative parenting style to be more effective with positive impacts on children's behaviors than the authoritarian parenting style. However, not much research is to study what factors are influential to the pathway of authoritarian parenting. Among this study theme, most of them supported the claim to explain the choice of parenting style by intergenerational transmission. Learning through observation and first-hand experience of being parented in childhood are important sources of learning how to be a parent. However, the explanation simply by intergenerational transmission seems inadequate to provide a better picture of the development of different parenting styles with the consideration at a micro or individualistic level.

Effective parenting requires not only parenting skills and knowledge but also energy and confidence in the process of parenting. The concern of whether parents' internal resources are adequate and robust enough for parenting seems to be an essential topic for parenting effectiveness. The findings in this study reported that the parental attribute of the control was significantly affecting parents' intention to use authority and power in child discipline, leading to a higher possibility to exercise an authoritarian parenting style. In other words, parents exercising the authoritarian parenting style may represent a specific group of parents who fear losing power and authority in parenting. To secure their control over their children, using the authoritarian parenting style to enforce strict rules and ensure obedience may make them feel more secure in their role as parents, especially when authority and power are both vital to parents.

The findings of this study can provide a new blueprint to develop the curriculum of parent education. In addition to teaching parenting skills and the re-establishment of a parent-child relationship, how to increase a parent's internal resources, especially the sense of parental control, serves as a new direction for parent education. Building up parental self-efficacy is one of the key elements in parent education. Parent educators can run workshops and seminars to help parents enrich their parenting knowledge and learn new parenting skills. More importantly, parent educators are suggested to emphasize building up parents' self-confidence to let them develop a stronger sense of controllability in parenting. This parent education approach will no longer treat parenting as simply a skill training on child-rearing. Instead, parenting can now be viewed as a process of self-development and growth. The parents and their child can both be the ones to benefit.

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