



# The Psychological Impact of Authoritarian Parenting on Children and the Youth

Yuqing Chen<sup>(✉)</sup>

Education and Social Work Development, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RH, UK  
yc474@sussex.ac.uk

**Abstract.** The early development of children is closely related to family upbringing, and the parenting style used by caregivers will affect the future development of children. As the more negative parenting style of the four parenting styles, relatively few studies were done about the children and youth's psychological development under the authoritarian parenting styles. Therefore, this article reviews the research on the psychological impact of authoritarian parenting styles on children and youth to analyze further and help caregivers recognize the risks of using authoritarian parenting styles. A review of previous research found that the use of authoritarian parenting has long-term adverse effects on children's health, regardless of age, including lowering children's self-esteem, psychological flexibility and maturity, and even may cause their mental illness. But authoritarian parenting styles may have different outcomes in different cultures. For example, authoritarian parenting by caregivers in collectivist cultures may help their children better integrate into society. While a parent should avoid authoritarian parenting. But they can still think about whether they can use this type of parenting in the context of their environment to use better ways to raise their children.

**Keywords:** Developmental Psychology · Authoritarian Parenting Style · Self-Esteem · Psychological Flexibility · Psychological Maturity

## 1 Introduction

In developmental psychology, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system can help analyze child development. The family as one of the important factors in mesosystems may influence later ecosystems and macrosystems. In other words, factors in each system have an impact on a child's future development, which make each unique. Children are vulnerable and impressionable at an early age. They were born with nature, the biological traits that come from their parents; and nurture, the environment in which they grow up. Until fifty years ago, the concept of "parenting style" was formalized in developmental psychology by Baumrind as a means of characterizing the way caregivers control and discipline their children [1]. Although a large number of psychological literature links parenting style with the results of children and adolescents in subsequent years, its impact has only recently begun to be explicitly considered [2].

The parenting style Baumrind introduced is a key role in helping predict and analyze a child's future behaviour [1]. More importantly, good parenting can improve children's

self-esteem, mental flexibility and maturity to help them prepare for the next phase of life. Therefore, understanding the use of parenting styles and avoiding using parenting styles that have adverse consequences is very important. Baumrind introduced four types of parenting: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglectful [3]. Of the four parenting styles, authoritative is considered a better parenting style that helps children develop, while the other three parenting styles, especially the authoritarian, may have negative effects.

However, many studies have only looked at partial effects and mostly externalising effects in children and youth. This paper will focus on the psychological effects of authoritarian parenting. First, it will introduce what parenting is and where it comes from. The meaning and performance of authoritarian parenting, and the interconnectedness of attachment relationships and parenting styles. It will then discuss how authoritarian parenting styles can negatively impact children's self-esteem and children's mental flexibility and maturity, and even lead to mental health disorders. Finally, a discussion on the limitations of the current study and the future.

## **2 Parenting Method, Authoritarian**

### **2.1 Parenting Method and The Origins**

Early experiences are critical in laying a person's lateral life [2]. Researchers recognise that children's intellectual, emotional, and social development are closely related to their home environment before they enter school. The sense of well-being that the family shapes the child has a crucial impact on the child's future development. Parenting style as parental investments and institutional arrangements that caregivers choose is one of the factors that determine the happiness of children. Sometimes caregivers' social economic status (SES) even the cognitive resources of caregivers determine their investment in their children. Therefore, researchers began to study the parenting style and caregivers' SES in relation to children's development and the family's investment in children, including helping with education, accompanying children, monitoring activities, and provide a good living environment and food. Through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System, it is possible to clarify the close connection between family situation, social background, national culture, etc. and individuals.

### **2.2 Authoritarian Parenting Styles**

Baumrind derived four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful by analyzing the two factors of acceptance-responsiveness and demandingness- permissiveness (controlling) [3]. Through studying the two factors, Baumrind determines the type of interaction and the child's relationship with the parent. The acceptance-responsiveness dimension refers to parental intimacy and support for the child. This factor shows how caregivers respond to their child's needs. The demandingness- permissiveness (controlling) dimension refers to the expectations a parent has of the child to regulate his or her behaviour and monitor the activities [2]. Different combinations and their levels of use determine the types of parenting styles

caregivers used through interactions with children [4]. According to Fonseca, in the parenting style of high demand and low response, children of caregivers with strong authoritarian style tend to be more independent, cooperative and achievement oriented [5]. Caregivers who adopt this parenting method show lower enthusiasm, but higher level of control. They are often insensitive to children's needs and expect them to abide by their specific and strict rules, and sometimes even use punishment. Authoritarian parenting styles are associated with negative outcomes for young people, such as externalized and internalized problems, and decreased their social and emotional abilities [5]. This article is going to focus on analyzing the psychological impact of children under an authoritarian parenting style.

### **2.3 Parenting Method and Attachment**

The relationship between parenting styles and attachment relationships is reciprocal [4]. Attachment refers to the connection between children and caregivers from emotional and physical perspectives at an early stage. Albert & Bowlby emphasized the importance of parenting sensitivity and responsiveness in childhood, indicating that caregivers' parenting behaviour is related to children's attachment style [4]. Caregivers who securely attached children is similar to caregivers use authoritative parenting style. Both of them have high sensitivity to children's needs and do not use punishment in parenting, but treat children with a warm, kind and intimate attitude. Caregivers of avoidantly attached children are similar to those of authoritarian parenting styles. Their behaviour includes the use of strict attitudes and control over the child's behaviour [6]. The children of these caregivers are characterized by depression, anger and low self-esteem [4, 7–9]. In addition, children with conflicted attachment have similar characteristics to children under permissive parenting style. Permissive caregivers are usually free discipline and often do not punish the children. Children with ambivalent attachment have similar characteristics. Baumrind pointed out in 1967 that children with permissive caregivers had lower self-control and social confidence [3]. A lot of research shows that caregivers who use authoritarian parenting often have varying degrees of psychological impact on their children. In particular, high-intensity control and over protection may reduce children's self-esteem, psychological flexibility and psychological maturity to a great extent. It may even aggravate the occurrence of depression and other mental diseases in children.

## **3 Psychological Effect of Authoritarian Parenting**

### **3.1 Low Self-Esteem**

The use of the authoritarian parenting style may decrease children's self-esteem [9, 10]. Self-esteem refers to a person's confidence and values in one's abilities, which is influenced by multiple factors and the first derived from the parent or family environment [9]. The family environment may be the most vulnerable factor that can affect a person's self-esteem. Children are expected to obey strict orders without explanation from their caregivers who use the authoritarian parenting style with high demands. This kind of behavior makes children lose their autonomy and choice. Failure by caregivers to

articulate these rules and the requirement of blindly following instructions without their own ideas and thinking will cause them to lose their self-awareness and reduce their self-esteem [9, 10]. Milevsky et al. found the adverse effects on children's self-esteem by studying students about 9–11 years old who experienced authoritarian parenting in a public high school in the United States [11]. In a survey of the group of 11–12-year-old students, Wolff had similar findings [9]. Herz & Gullone's study of Vietnamese-Australians and Anglo-Australians aged around 11–18 found children of authoritarian parenting had lower academic achievement and lower self-esteem [12]. A study by Bun et al. of 230 college students found that their self-esteem was inversely proportional to their v' authoritarian parenting style [13]. Another study of college students done by Zakeri & Karimpour had similar findings [14]. DeHart et al. found that adults whose caregivers use authoritarian parenting exhibited lower self-esteem [15]. These studies on different age groups show that authoritarian parenting can reduce children's self-esteem. These influences accompany a person's growth. As their self-esteem decreases, they will have obvious problems with their daily life and work. However, there are some varies between cultural differences, Rudy and Grusec reported the use of authoritarian parenting by caregivers in collectivist culture has positive effects on children, especially with a little negative impact on children's self-esteem [16]. It can also lead to higher academic achievements.

### 3.2 Psychological Flexibility

Lower psychological flexibility may result from the authoritarian parenting style. Psychological flexibility is a kind of structure, which can describe everyone's emotions, thoughts, and the ability to choose adaptive responses based on personal experience. It is largely consistent with the definition of self-control and emotional regulation [17]. People with lower psychological flexibility have fewer chances of experiencing and lack of choice when facing problems. They may avoid relationships and interactions with people when having social anxiety, while mental rigidity involving the excessive use of inhibition, suppression, and avoidance may exacerbate negative thoughts, emotions, arousal, and distress. Authoritarian parenting as an inflexible and avoidant strategy is associated with avoidant attachment [18]. This might lead to lower psychological flexibility and causes the child to avoid problems but not solve problems. Continued low parental involvement and high levels of control or overprotection by caregivers who are not aware of their children's emotions can lead to reduced personal functioning and well-being. The low level of children's sense of well-being and satisfaction will reduce psychological flexibility as a very important factor. High parental control reduces children's psychological flexibility by stimulating guilt, fear, or resentment in children [19], deprives children of opportunities to practice the skills of psychological flexibility in a supportive environment, and may prevent children from later into society in life. Moilanen et al. made a similar point, through directional research, that psychological flexibility [19] can be negatively affected by mind-controlled parenting. Looking at boys in low-income families found that high levels of psychological control predicted a gradual decline in boys' psychological flexibility over the course of a year. The ability of children's psychological flexibility may influence parental behaviour [17]. Child will in turn stimulate parental stress [5], and then it may lead to further control by caregivers

creating a vicious cycle. However, in many places like Turkey, India, Latin America, Asia, etc. where caregivers tend to use authoritarian parenting in order to integrate their children into the collectivist culture better. Authoritarian parenting won't affect their children's self-esteem [16, 20]. Therefore, it can be concluded that in authoritarian parenting, the increase of parental control and excessive protection will lead to the reduction of children's psychological flexibility, and may lead to a vicious circle.

### 3.3 Psychological Maturity

In addition, it has been confirmed that children's psychological flexibility and psychological maturity are related. Through studying, Mantzicopoulos & Oh-Hwang found that the parenting style can predict children's psychological maturity and the authoritarian parenting style is used leads to lower psychological maturity [20]. High levels of parental control and overprotection in authoritarian parenting can cause children to lose autonomy and struggle to gain self-approval from life and work. As a result, they may have lower psychological maturity and possibly lower intelligence. Korean adolescents who were taught under authoritarian parenting styles have been reported to have lower psychological maturity. Similar situations exist in the United States. It's just that girls' psychological maturity is relatively higher due to social and cultural pressures. This evidence shows that the authoritarian parenting method will have an impact on children's psychological maturity. It's just that in different cultural backgrounds, the measure of psychological maturity is different.

### 3.4 Mental Health Disorder

The relationship between caregivers and children and the parenting style can be used as factors to predict and analyze children's emotions, behaviours, and even mental health. Authoritarian parenting is connected to avoidant relationships and has a positive relationship with children's depression, anxiety, and related psychological disorders [7, 8]. In other words, the use of the authoritarian parenting style by caregivers may lead to low psychological flexibility and maturity in their children. Some people with a worse parent-child relationship and internalized issues are associated with high levels of dysphoria and others may have a higher risk of hypomania and psychosis [21]. Although some researchers show that authoritarian parenting will not cause negative results in Chinese children, it still causes depression and internalized problems from certain levels [7]. The same finding comes from two studies on adolescents in Turkey [22] and Jamaica [23], where parental punishment of adolescents has no direct impact on their psychology, but through their own psychological adjustment ability to perceive and adjust to reduce caregivers Punishment hurts their psyche. However, the high level of parental control and caregivers' rejection is still associated with children's anxiety, depression, loneliness, and behavioural problems [8]. Among them, corporal punitive interactions (physical aggression) of caregivers were associated with the incidence of disruptive behaviour problems, aggression, and child bullying. A mother's high level of control may even lead to eating disorders and lower perception; while a father's high level of control is more likely to lead to alcohol and drug dependence. A high degree of control over a child's life and choices by following a parent's instructions to avoid outside distractions

and influences may seem overly protective. Overprotected children are more likely to develop symptoms of social anxiety, social phobia, and high depressive symptoms, as well as an increased risk of anorexia nervosa in adolescence [8]. To sum up, overprotection and high levels of control in authoritarian parenting are very likely to cause higher levels of depression, anxiety, and other related internalized issues in children. Therefore, keeping a good parent-child relationship and using a better parenting style is very important when raising a child.

#### **4 Limitation and Future Direction**

The research covered in the article demonstrates the negative psychological effects of authoritarian parenting on children from different age groups. However, this comparison of ages is not directed (fixed population) follow-up but results from studies conducted by different researchers on different age groups. Therefore, in the future, there can be targeted studies with long-term follow-up of targeted populations, so as to discover the impact of authoritarian parenting at various ages. In addition, most of the findings were generated through self-reported, self-measured results by caregivers and children. It is subjective and may be biased. In the future, there should be more research measured by the researchers to keep the accuracy of the results. It is even possible to analyze the differences in the impact of authoritarian parenting in different families' economic and social status by studying the Socioeconomic Status of caregivers.

In addition, the examples of differences caused by cultural differences mentioned above are worth being notified. As Vélez-Agosto et al. mentioned in the article, Culture and Customs in the Macrosystem are almost ever formally introduced by Bronfenbrenner. Vygotsky's study stated that parenting is just one of many factors that might affect a child's mental health factors such as school, media, social and culture can also affect a child [24]. Among them, culture is a very important consideration since it is included in daily practice and is worth considering in future research on development. The use of authoritarian parenting in European and American countries always has a negative association with children's development and may even lead to ineffective parenting [16]. However, in many countries that highlight the culture of interdependence, the authoritarian parenting style has positive results on children's development. Similar results were found when comparing and contrasting the individualistic and collectivist societies. In the collectivist society, the use of an authoritarian parenting style could help children integrate into the collective society, but also has a positive impact on their academic performance and lower the possibility to reduce their self-esteem [25]. In addition, people's understanding of "filial piety" has changed under the influence of East Asian Confucius cultures. Chao mentioned that in East Asian culture, people feel that filial piety is obeying caregivers' will without expressing their own thoughts [25]. Children are expected to obey adults' orders and monitor and be sensitive to others' criticism. They were trained to be sensitive to the rules of society and be shamed when breaking the rules. This is very similar to the culture of collectivist societies. Children need these skills to be better involved in society. To think about from caregivers' perspectives, they are considered obliged to educate their children and train them to behave in a quiet, socially normal and self-controlled manner in Chinese culture. The "control" has positive meanings in

East Asian cultures, including “care,” “love,” or even “domination”, and also yields positive results [26]. Authoritarian parenting is even associated with parental dedication and willingness to make sacrifices for the well-being of children, and this parenting style is supported by both caregivers and children [25]. Under the culture, children consider the use of authoritarian punishment as a normal duty from caregivers. Chinese [25], African-American [27], Turkey [28], and Arab [29] children view authoritarian parenting as caring-related positive caregiver attitude and love. Authoritarian parenting in these cultures is not associated with psychological disorders, but with better social and psychological adjustment. Therefore, when doing research in the future, it is necessary to take into account the influence of cultural background.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper discussed the psychological effects of children whose caregivers use the Authoritarian parenting style. Research has found that authoritarian parenting is a relatively defective parenting style. It is associated with negative psychological effects. The high intensity of parental control and the lack of warmth or responsiveness to children’s needs or excessive protection can easily lead to children losing their right to choose and self-awareness. This may reduce their self-esteem, psychological flexibility and psychological maturity, and may even lead to mental illnesses such as depression and mania. These findings should be taken seriously by caregivers and educators to avoid authoritarian parenting. The studies covered in the article were largely based on self-reports by caregivers or children. Therefore, there may be deviations from the real situation. And most of the studies are about high school students, and there are fewer studies on young children and adults. Therefore, more research on these age groups and experimenter-directed observation can be done in future research.

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