Parenting Styles and Stress Coping Strategies in Adolescents and Young Adults: A Chinese Perspective

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Abstract. The current study investigates the correlation between parenting style and children's stress coping mechanisms. The sample comprises 168 Chinese participants, aged 16-25, who were assessed using Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), Patient health questionnaire (PHQ-9), Parenting bonding instrument (PBI) and Simplified stress coping response (SSCR). The results reveal a positive correlation between the use of approach coping strategy and parent's allowance of freedom and expression of caring. Conversely, the use of avoidance coping strategy correlates with maternal rejection/indifference, over protection of both parents and parental allowance freedom.

Keywords: stress coping, parenting style, depression, anxiety

1 Introduction

Stress is an unavoidable aspect of student life, which has the potential to impact student's success academically, emotionally and socially (Ghouri, et.al, 2024)[1]. A trans-cultural study in Asia showed that Chinese college students had the highest level of stress compared to Japanese and Korean college students, and high stress in university students can lead to suicidal thoughts, violent behavior, homicide, depression, anxiety and dormitory conflicts (Mohino, et.al, 2004.)[2-3] Thus, it is crucial for students to use effective coping strategies to alleviate stress.

Coping is defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person and allows student to manage specific demands or stressors (Mohino. et.al, 2004; Thakre, N. 2021)[3-4]. Coping strategies could be divided into two categories, approach coping and avoidance coping. Approach coping include Logical Analysis, Positive Reappraisal, Seeking Guidance and Support, Problem Solving; avoidance coping include Cognitive Avoidance, Acceptance and Resignation, Seeking Alternative Rewards and Emotional Discharge (Thakre, 2021)[4].

Parenting style refers to the strategy of how parents rear their child. Adolescence is a period of transition from dependent relationships to independent one, and parenting style can play a critical role in helping adolescents to meet this great challenge. Children of unloving and controlling parenting style would reduce self-efficacy and cause

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them to develop anxiety and depression, it would also influence their academic effectiveness. Parents who use uninvolved and permissive parenting would cause their child to have behavioral problems such as aggression and frequent moodswings. (Rakhshani. et.al, 2022)[5]

Parenting is not only critical for the development of children's mental health, but also necessary for developing the adequate coping skills for their child (Rakhshani. et.al, 2022)[5]. Although psychologists and theorists emphasize the role of parenting styles in stress coping, very little research has been done on investigating the relationship of parenting style and stress coping in Chinese families. This study was designed to understand the impact of parenting on coping with stress among adolescents. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. Adolescence's depression/anxiety severely is positively correlated with their parents' showing rejection/indifference.

Hypothesis 2. Adolescence's depression/anxiety severely is negatively correlated with parents showing caring and allowing freedom.

Hypothesis 3. Adolescence of parents showing caring and allowing freedom will more likely use approach coping strategy.

Hypothesis 4. Adolescence of parents showing rejection/indifference and overprotection will more likely use avoidance coping strategy.

2 Methods

Participants: this study received 182 responses, 14 were ether over age or under age, so the remaining participants consists of 168 Chinese adolescent boys and girls within the age range of 16 to 25 years old. The sample of the study was collected through the method of online survey, consists of multiple sections, including parenting style, depression, anxiety, and stress coping strategy.

Measurements:

Demographic information questionnaire. A questionnaire was prepared to collect demographic information from participants, such as age, education board and family details. Economic status is divided into 3 categories, 0-3=weak, 4-7=medium , 8-10=good.

Patient health questionnaire (PHQ-9). Participant's depression was measured through Patient health questionnaire (PHQ-9), a 9 item self report inventory designed to assess depression based on Mental Disorder Diagnostic and Statistical Manual,Fouth Edition. The participants were asked to describe the frequency of depressing events over the past two weeks, ranging from 0 point=non of the time, 1 point=some days, 2 points=more than half of the time, 3 points=almost every day. The higher the score, the more severity of depression, 0-4=healthy, 5-9=subthreshold depression, 10-14=mild depression, 15-19=moderate depression, 20-27=severe depression. According to Yong. Et.al (2007)[6] & Costantini. et.al (2021)[7], PHQ-9 has a Chronbach's alpha of 0.832, and has high internal consistency reliability

Generalized Anxiexy Disorder-7 (GAD-7)

Participant's anxiety was measured through Generalized Anxiexy Disorder-7 (GAD-7), a 7 Item self report inventory designed to assess anxiety, which include 1. stress and anxiety, 2. cannot control concern, 3. over-concern. 4. cannot relax, 5. cannot sit sill, 6. easily agitated, 7. have a bad feeling about something. The participants were asked to describe the frequency of such anxiety symptoms over the past 2 weeks, ranging from 0 point=non of the time, 1 point=some days, 2 points=more than half of the time, 3 points=almost every day. Higher score represents higher severity of anxiety symptoms, 0-4=healthy, 5-9=subthreshold anxiety, 10-13=mild anxiety, 14-18=moderate anxiety, 19-27=severe anxiety. According to Yu.. Et.al (2018)[8], GAD-7 has a Chronbach's alpha of 0.9 and a test-retest reliability of 0.76.

Parenting bonding instrument (PBI)

Participant's family relationship is measured through Parenting bonding instrument (PBI), it measures the perceived parent attitude as caring, rejection/indifference, over protective and allowing freedom. The tool consists of 24 items, with 6 items for each parenting style. Each participant has to answer each item on a 4 point scale, ranging from 0=strongly disagree to 3=strongly agree. Higher the score represents that the family style to be dominant with the particular attitude. According to Jiang. et.al (2009)[9], PBI has a Chronbach's alpha of 0.74 to 0.85, internal consistency reliability of 0.740－0.851, and test-retest reliability of 0.619－0.765.

Simplified stress coping response (SSCR)

Participant's Coping response were measured by using Simplified stress coping response (SSCR), it measures the possible response tactic that the participant would use when encounters a set back or a stressful situation. The tool consists of 20 items with 10 items in each category: approach coping or avoidance coping. Each participant has to answer each item on a 4 point scale, ranging from 0= I would not use such tactic, 1= I would occasionally use this tactic, 2= I would sometimes use this tactic, 3= I would often use this tactic. According to Yaning. (1998)[11] & Xiangdong.. et.al (1999)[10], SSCR has a Chronbach's alpha of 0.90, where approach coping response's alpha value is 0.89, and avoidance coping response's alpha value is 0.78.

3 Results

In this study, the findings were analyzed by using Pearson correlation, as sample size for each independent variable are consistent. The relationship between parenting style and coping response, depression/anxiety level, were analyzed with SPSS program Vers 26. Demographic information is shown in table 1, The result's descriptive statistics and the inter-correlation of measures is shown in table 1 and table 2.

Table 1. demographic information of participants

Variables		values	
Number of participants		168	
Particpant's Age		M=20.036	Sdv=2.432
Participant's grade	grade 11 or below	23	

	Grade 12	18
	freshman	27
	Sophomore	25
	junior	26
	Senior or above	49
Father's education	Middle school or below	66
	technical secondary school	38
	Community college	27
	University or above	37
Mother's education	Middle school or below	62
	technical secondary school	46
	Community college	25
	University or above	34
Economic status	weak	23
	medium	99
	good	46
Number of children	One child	81
	Two children	68
	Three children	17
	Four children or above	2
depression	healthy	63
	Subthreshold depression	68
	Mild depression	14
	Moderate depression	12
	Severe depression	11
anxiety	healthy	67
	Subthreshold anxiety	59
	Mild anxiety	21
	Moderate anxiety	12
	Severe anxiety	9

Table 2. the inter-correlation within all variables

variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Approach coping	1.86	0.6	—											
	1	06	—											
avoidance coping	1.31	0.5	.398	——										
	1	92	**											
depression	7.13	6.3	-0.0	-.226	——									
	7	92	72	**										
anxiety	6.55	5.6	-0.0	-.224	.820	——								
	4	88	87	**	**									
rejec-	7.74	3.5	-0.0	0.14	.433	.41*	——							
tion/indifferen	4	16	69		**	*								

ce														
(father)														
rejec-	7.33	3.4	-0.0	.248	.408	.335	.783	——						
tion/indifferen	3	31	46	**	**	**	**							
ce														
(mother)														
Over protec-	7.76	3.2	0.00	.216	.297	.227	.430	.545	—					
tion (Father)	2	96	3	**	**	**	**	**	—					
Over protec-	8.04	3.3	0.03	.184	.296	.257	.430	.503	.894	—				
tion (mother)	2	91	9	*	**	**	**	**	**	—				
Allowing	11.6	3.4	.251	.215	-.211	-.158	-0.15	-0.05	-0.0	-0.0	—			
freedom	37	48	**	**	**	*		2	74	75	—			
(father)														
Allowing	11.4	3.4	.237	0.11	-.282	-.217	-0.14	-.187	-0.0	-0.1	.863	—		
freedom	4	22	**	3	**	**	7	*	82	05	**	—		
(mother)														
Caring (father)	11.2	3.6	.232	0.14	-.264	-.289	-.393	-.181	0.11	0.08	.712	.637	—	
	62	63	**	7	**	**	**	*	7	4	**	**	—	
Caring	11.6	3.4	.272	0.06	-.233	-.178	-.237	-.355	0.07	0.10	.657	.749	.732	—
(mother)	13	97	**	8	**	*	**	**	9	8	**	**	**	—

*. $p<0.05$ **, $p<0.01$

According to table 2, there is a positive correlation between using approach coping strategies and parent's allowing freedom (father: 0.251; mother: 0.237) and caring (father: 0.232; mother: 0.272), indicating that adolescence who were in a caring and freedom family environment is more likely to use approach stress coping strategies; the correlation between usage of positive coping strategies with rejection/indifference and over protection are insignificant.

Using avoidance coping strategy is positively correlated with rejection/indifference of mothers (0.248), over protection of both parents (father: 0.216; mother: 0.184) and allowing freedom of fathers (0.215), indicating that adolescence is more likely to use avoidance coping strategy when parents showed rejection/indifference, protection and allowing freedom

The level of depression/anxiety is positively correlated with rejection/indifference and over protection, indicating that adolescence is more likely to have depression/anxiety when parents showed rejection and over protection. level of depression/anxiety is negatively correlated with parent allowing freedom and caring, indicating that adolescence is less likely to have depression/anxiety when parent showing freedom and caring.

4 Discussion

Our study revealed direct associations between parenting style and Chinese adolescence stress coping response: parents that showed freedom and caring is positively correlated with their child using approach coping response; rejection/indifference, over

protection, and allowing freedom is positively correlated with their child using avoidance coping strategy

Family environment plays a critical role in development, parents that accept their child and show clear communication are more likely to be effective social models, their child are more likely to learn the appropriate behavior and aim to improve more and adjust better on their self-concept. (Thakre. 2021)[4]. Parental rejection on the other hand, lead to aggression in children, and show maladjusted behavior and lack self-control. Thus, parenting plays an important role in developing coping strategies which in turn affects habits and motivation (Thakre. 2021)[4]. The results from this study showed that adolescence are more likely to have depression and anxiety when parents show rejection and over protection, study showed that both rejection and over protection are harmful to the child, and rejection of child from parents especially produces an extremely high level of mental strain, causing children to respond aggressively towards external factors, and are more likely to encounter emotional problems such as depression and anxiety (Thakre. 2021).

Parents that show support and acceptance lead to more positive outcomes. In this study adolescence are more likely to use approach coping strategy when parents show allowing freedom and caring, indicating that they have better psychosocial adjustment. This study showed that adolescence is more likely to use avoidance coping strategy when parents show rejection/indifference and over-protection, which is consistent with previous studies as parents that show involvement and support are negatively correlated with using avoidance coping strategies (Thakre. 2021). Both approach and avoidance coping response are positively correlated with parents allowing freedom, which is inconsistent with our hypothesis, one explanation of this is result is probably because allowing too much freedom leads to neglection, and child of uninvolved parenting used avoidant coping strategies more often than approach coping strategies. (Schneider. M. et.al, 2005)[12]

According to Chao. K.(1994)[13], Chinese parenting was often associated with high control and achievement focus, which is consistent with the higher stress observed in Chinese adolescence. Compared to western studies, parenting and childhood depression in China are generally similar to those observed in Western countries, as Parental warmth and acceptance are negatively associated with childhood depression, while parental rejection and punishment are positively associated. Maternal parenting appears to have a stronger influence on child depression compared to paternal parenting in China, which is consistent with this study's finding as rejection from mothers are more associated with using avoidance coping strategies (Liu & Merritt,2018)[14].

This study has implications for intervention when working with Chinese adolescence, the finding suggests that Chinese adolescence are more likely to use problematic coping response when parents show strict parenting or neglect, thus it is recommended for parents to be more involved and caring to decrease the likelihood of avoid approach coping strategy, such as taking a parenting training program, as study showed that it could effectively reduce negative parenting behavior of parents, such as shifting from strict parenting style toward a more caring approach (Rakhshani. et.al, 2022)[5], For education faculty members, it is recommended to have mental health services on adolescence, as study shown that mental health service is more effective in adolescence

over the age of 14 (Ágnes. et.al, 2024)[15]. It would also be helpful if such practice is led by professionals or researchers, as study showed that mental health service is more effective when delivered by mental health professionals,(Ágnes. et.al, 2024)[15].

However, there are limitations in this study: the participants were limited, which is not generalized enough to represent the entire Chinese population; many questions were cut as the participants were reluctant to fill in the response as the survey takes too long, also the sample size wasn't big enough with only 168 participants. Future studies should focus on other surveys such as PAQ (parent authority questionare) on four parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved), and CRI (coping response inventory) to further structuralize approach (logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking guidance and support, problem solving) and avoidance (cognitive avoidance, acceptance and resignation, seeking alternative rewards, emotional discharge) coping response; futhermore, future studies should also try to sample from other Chinese province to increase generality.

5 Conclusion

The finding of Chinese adolescence sample revealed the effect of parenting style on Chinese adolescence's stress coping response. This study supported the notion that strict parenting and neglect is positively correlated with maladaptive coping strategies, and showing care and involvement is positively correlated with approach coping strategies. Furthermore, this study provides practical implications for future intervention and prevention programs that could improve student's mental quality

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