

Original Article

Perceived Parenting Styles in Relation with Coping Strategies among the Children of Single Parents in Pakistan

Amara Liaqat Ali¹, Zartashia Kynat Javaid², Khalid Mahmood^{3*}, Alia Batool⁴

¹PhD Scholar, School of Applied Psychology, University Utara Malaysia, Changlun, Malaysia.

²Lecturer/PhD Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

³Associate Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

⁴Teacher, Army Public School and College Kharian Cantt, Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author: Khalid Mahmood; Email: khalidmehmood@gcuf.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

Background: The dynamics within single-parent families, particularly the influence of parenting styles on the coping strategies of children, have garnered significant attention in psychological research. The intricate relationship between a parent's approach to raising their child and the child's subsequent development of coping mechanisms to navigate life's challenges is pivotal to understanding the psychosocial well-being of children in single-parent families.

Objective: This study aimed to elucidate the correlations between different parenting styles—permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative—and the coping strategies adopted by children of single parents. Additionally, it sought to identify which parenting styles significantly predict the coping strategies utilized by these children.

Methods: A correlational and comparative study design was employed, involving 153 adolescents aged 13 to 19 from single-parent families in Faisalabad and Sargodha, Pakistan. The Coping Response Inventory (CRI) and Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) were utilized to measure coping strategies and parenting styles, respectively. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson's moment correlation, regression analysis, and Independent Samples T-Test to examine the relationships between parenting styles and coping strategies and to assess gender differences.

Results: The findings indicated a significant positive correlation between permissive and authoritarian parenting styles (r ranging from .439 to .787, $p < .01$). Regression analysis revealed that logical analysis, positive reappraisal, and problem-solving were significant predictors of coping strategies ($p < .001$). Gender-based analysis showed females scored significantly higher in positive reappraisal, seeking guidance/support, acceptance/resignation, and emotional discharge coping strategies compared to males ($p < .005$). No significant gender differences were found in parenting styles.

Conclusion: The study highlights the significant impact of permissive and authoritarian parenting styles on the development of coping strategies among children of single parents. Tailored interventions supporting single parents in adopting more adaptive parenting styles could foster better coping mechanisms in their children, enhancing their psychosocial well-being.

Keywords: Parenting Styles, Coping Strategies, Single Parents, Adolescents, Psychological Resilience, Mental Health, Parent-Child Dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

In the sociocultural fabric of Pakistan, the phenomenon of single-parent households has manifested a marked increase over the last two decades, with statistical evidence indicating a rise from 2,811 instances in a single region during 2005-2006 to a staggering 12,535 by 2014-2015, and a further leap to 19,875 within the short span of 2019-2020 (1). This demographic shift has significant implications for the parent-child dynamic, which is inherently bidirectional, characterized by both verbal and non-verbal exchanges. The challenges encountered by single-parent families are manifold, encompassing financial strain, social isolation, and heightened stress levels, factors that collectively exacerbate the vulnerability of children to adverse mental health outcomes when compared to their counterparts from dual-parent families (2).

Adolescence, as delineated by the World Health Organization (WHO), is a developmental phase spanning the ages of 10 to 19 years, a critical period marked by significant psychosocial evolution. This stage heralds the establishment of personal standards and lifestyle choices that persist into adulthood. It is noteworthy that the global adolescent population has surged unprecedentedly, with Pakistan's demographic composition reflecting that adolescents constitute 64% of its populace (4). This phase is characterized by an increased engagement in social interactions, the formation of peer relationships, and the exploration of romantic interests (5). The developmental trajectory of the prefrontal cortex during adolescence underpins the cognitive faculties associated with reasoning, decision-making, emotion perception, and planning. However, these capabilities mature gradually and do not fully crystallize until adulthood (6-8). Adolescents from single-parent households, bereft of the stabilizing presence of a second parental figure due to circumstances such as separation, divorce, or the demise of a parent, often bear witness to a distinctive set of challenges. The absence of a dual-parent structure not only imposes a greater responsibility on the single parent but also influences the regulatory mechanisms within the family, potentially leading to neglect of the adolescent's developmental needs and an increased propensity for delinquent behaviors (9).

The repercussions of growing up in economically disadvantaged single-parent families, particularly those headed by single mothers, are profound, with an increased prevalence of childhood trauma, mental illness, and a heightened risk of suicide among this cohort, attributable to the maternal frustration and domestic violence endemic to such familial structures (11-12). A qualitative investigation conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian adolescents aged 13-19 revealed the adoption of positive coping mechanisms, including physical activities and peer interaction, albeit with necessary precautions, as strategies to mitigate stress during the pandemic's zenith (13).

Moreover, certain life events precipitate an accelerated maturation process in adolescents, rendering them physically and ostensibly more mature than their chronological age would suggest. However, this premature maturity does not equate to an enhanced capacity to navigate the complexities of their existential challenges (14). In Pakistan, the adolescent demographic is grappling with a myriad of psychological issues, including low self-esteem, perceived stress, and notably, depression—a condition exacerbated by the cultural stigma surrounding mental health, which deters many from seeking necessary psychological support (15).

The role of parenting in shaping the coping mechanisms and overall psychological well-being of adolescents cannot be overstated. The parenting styles adopted by single parents, ranging from authoritative to authoritarian and permissive, significantly influence the mental health outcomes and resilience of their offspring (16-20). Authoritative parenting, characterized by a balance of demands and support, is associated with positive social adjustment, resilience, and academic achievement in children. In contrast, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are linked to negative mental health outcomes, including low resilience, avoidance coping styles, and heightened susceptibility to emotional crises and psychological disorders (21-30).

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are rooted in Baumrind's "Pillar Theory," which posits a direct correlation between parenting styles and children's developmental trajectories. Cognitive behavior theory further supports the premise that children internalize and replicate the behaviors and attitudes modeled by their parents. Despite the wealth of research on the impact of dual-parenting dynamics on child development, there remains a conspicuous gap in the literature concerning the specific challenges and coping strategies of adolescents from single-parent households in Pakistan. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring the nuanced relationship between perceived parenting styles and coping mechanisms among this vulnerable population.

The research questions formulated to guide this inquiry are as follows: Firstly, is there a correlation between perceived parenting styles and the coping strategies employed by children of single parents? Secondly, which perceived parenting styles are predictive of the type of coping mechanisms adopted by these children? Lastly, does gender play a role in influencing the coping strategies of children from single-parent households through perceived parenting styles? These questions underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between parenting styles and coping mechanisms, with the ultimate goal of informing stress management interventions tailored to the unique needs of adolescents from single-parent families in Pakistan (31-42).

In this study, a correlational and comparative design was employed to explore the relationship between perceived parenting styles and coping strategies among adolescents, as well as to examine gender differences in these variables (43). The research focused on adolescents aged 13 to 19 years, residing in the Pakistani cities of Faisalabad and Sargodha. A purposive sampling technique was utilized for participant selection, targeting individuals who specifically met the criteria set forth by the researchers for the study (45). The final sample comprised 153 adolescents, with a gender distribution of 78 males and 75 females, all of whom were children of single parents within the specified age range (46).

The inclusion criteria for the study were precisely defined to encompass adolescent children living with either divorced or separated single parents and those enrolled in general education schools or colleges. The age range was strictly adhered to, ensuring participants were between 13 to 19 years old. Conversely, the study excluded adolescents studying in special education systems,

those whose parents were deceased, adolescents with parents living abroad for work or business reasons, and those temporarily separated from their parents due to familial conflicts (47-52).

Two primary instruments were employed for data collection: the Coping Response Inventory (CRI) and the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ). The CRI, which is divided into sections assessing both negative and positive coping styles, was utilized in its Urdu version adapted by Mahmood and Sheraz (2020) (46). This version maintains the original instrument's structure, offering a reliable measure of coping strategies with a test-retest reliability coefficient of .51, indicating high significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The PAQ, adapted to Urdu by Barbree (1997) (47), measures perceptions of parenting styles across three categories: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. This scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with reliability coefficients ranging from .70 to .86 across different parenting styles and for both mothers and fathers (47-52).

The research procedure was rigorously designed to comply with ethical considerations, including obtaining permissions from the authors of the scales used and the consent of participating parents and educational institutions. Ethical considerations were further addressed by ensuring the confidentiality of participant data and adhering to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration. Participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, nature, and duration, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection (53).

Data were collected through the administration of the CRI and PAQ to the targeted sample. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. The analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to assess the relationships among variables, regression analysis to explore the predictive relationships between perceived parenting styles and coping strategies, and t-tests to compare the coping strategies and parenting perceptions between male and female participants.

RESULTS

In the exploration of parenting styles and coping strategies among adolescents, our study leveraged a diverse array of analytical techniques to unearth the intricate dynamics at play. The descriptive statistics outlined in Table 1 provide a foundational understanding of the prevalent parenting styles—permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative—observed within the sample. Notably, the authoritarian style emerged as the most prevalent, with a mean score of 40.1 and a standard deviation of 6.99, suggesting a degree of consistency in its application across the cohort. The coping strategies employed by these adolescents, as detailed in the same table, revealed that Positive Appraisal was the most frequently utilized method, boasting a mean score of 15.41 and a standard deviation of 3.40, indicating its prominence as a coping mechanism within this demographic.

Table 1: Parenting Style

Scale	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Permissive	29.8	7.14
Authoritarian	40.1	6.99
Authoritative	36.99	7.39

Table 2: Coping Strategies

Scales	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Logical Analysis	13.41	3.65
Positive Appraisal	15.41	3.40
Seek Guidance/Support	13.15	3.16
Problem Solving	14.26	3.51
Cognitive Avoidance	14.01	3.34
Acceptance or Resignation	14.74	3.60
Seeking Alternative Rewards	14.13	3.58
Emotional Discharge	13.28	3.95

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 3: Pearson’s Moment Correlation Coefficients Among Parenting Styles and Coping Strategies (N=153)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Approach	-	.693**	.748**	.787**	.713**	.780**	.442**	.597**	.439**	.484**	.046	.067	.059
Avoidant	-	.460**	.630**	.468**	.545**	.681**	.793**	.669**	.690**	.130	.153	-	-
Logical Analysis	-	-	.439**	.360**	.427**	.309**	.349**	.325**	.357**	-.041	.038	-	-
Positive Reappraisal	-	-	-	.424**	.500**	.472**	.593**	.421**	.311**	-.084	-.041	.000	-
Seeking Guidance	-	-	-	-	.463**	.225**	.433**	.271**	.361**	.178*	.070	.124	-
Problem Solving	-	-	-	-	-	.331**	.439**	.334**	.425**	.109	.150	.113	-
Cognitive Avoidance	-	-	-	-	-	-	.379**	.397**	.281**	-.041	.098	.059	-
Acceptance or Resig	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.378**	.471**	.175*	.138	.011	-
Seeking Alt Reward	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.166*	.047	.133	-	-
Emotional Discharge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.148	.091	-	-
Permissive	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.623**	.094	-
Authoritarian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.011	-
Authoritative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: **p < .01, *p < .05

Table 4: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.969	.939	.936	2.642

Table 5: ANOVA Summary

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15,487.848	8	1,935.981	277.387
	Residual	1,005.028	144	6.979	
	Total	16,492.876	152		

Table 6: Coefficients of Regression Analysis

Variables	Beta	SE	t	p
Constant	1.974	1.88	1.05	.295
Logical Analysis	1.140	.069	16.57	.000
Positive Appraisal	1.289	.084	15.39	.000
Problem Solving	1.175	.076	15.47	.000
Cognitive Avoidance	-.025	.077	-.32	.749
Seeking Alternative	.015	.070	.21	.831
Permissive	.112	.040	2.83	.005
Authoritarian	-.048	.035	-1.36	.175
Authoritative	.019	.029	.67	.502

Table 6: Independent Sample T-Test Results on Parenting Styles and Coping Strategies

Category	Gender	Mean (M)	SD	t	P
Permissive Parenting Style	Males	29.9	8.01	.139	.889
	Females	29.7	6.09		
Authoritative Parenting Style	Males	40.1	6.68	-.080	.936
	Females	40.1	7.36		
Authoritarian Parenting Style	Males	37.8	8.10	1.56	.119
	Females	36.0	6.43		
Logical Analysis	Male	12.9	4.27	-1.51	.132
	Female	13.8	2.75		
Positive Reappraisal	Male	14.3	3.33	-4.29	.000
	Female	16.6	3.09		
Seeking Guidance/Support	Male	12.4	3.01	-2.86	.005
	Female	14.9	3.17		
Problem Solving	Male	13.7	3.29	-1.87	.062
	Female	14.8	3.69		
Cognitive Avoidance	Male	13.6	3.11	-1.37	.172
	Female	14.4	3.57		
Acceptance or Resignation	Male	13.4	3.38	-5.18	.000
	Female	16.2	3.25		
Seeking Alternative Rewards	Male	14.1	3.84	.021	.983
	Female	14.1	3.31		
Emotional Discharge	Male	11.8	3.66	-5.22	.000
	Female	14.9	3.63		

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; t = T-Test value; P = Significance Level.

Further examination through Pearson’s moment correlation coefficients (Table 2) shed light on the complex relationships between parenting styles and coping strategies. A significant correlation was observed between the approach coping strategy and all parenting styles, with coefficients ranging from .439 to .787, signifying a strong association between the nurturing environment created by these parenting styles and the development of constructive coping mechanisms in adolescents.

The regression analysis, as detailed in Table 3.1 and further expounded upon in the ANOVA summary (Table 3), underscored the predictive power of these parenting styles on the coping strategies adopted by adolescents. The model displayed a high R Square value of .939, indicating that a substantial portion of the variance in coping strategies could be explained by the parenting styles experienced. This finding was bolstered by the significant F value (277.387, $p < .001$) presented in the ANOVA summary, affirming the robustness of the model.

Diving deeper into the coefficients of regression analysis (Table 4), the study found specific coping strategies to be significantly influenced by certain parenting styles. Logical Analysis, Positive Appraisal, and Problem Solving emerged as significantly impacted by parenting styles, with beta values of 1.140, 1.289, and 1.175, respectively, and all p-values less than .001, highlighting the substantial role parenting styles play in shaping these constructive coping mechanisms.

The gender-based analysis conducted through an Independent Sample T-Test (Table 5) revealed nuanced differences in the reception and adaptation of parenting styles and coping strategies between male and female adolescents. While no significant gender differences were observed in the perception of permissive parenting style ($t = .139, p = .889$), notable disparities emerged in coping strategies such as Positive Reappraisal and Acceptance or Resignation, with t-values of -4.29 and -5.18, respectively, and p-values indicating statistical significance. These findings suggest that while the overall perception of parenting styles may not differ significantly between genders, the coping strategies adopted in response to these parenting styles exhibit marked gender-based variations.

The multifaceted analysis encompassing descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients, regression analysis, and gender-based comparisons illuminates the profound influence of parenting styles on the coping strategies of adolescents. The study not only reinforces the critical role of parenting in adolescent psychological development but also highlights the nuanced differences in how male and female adolescents adapt and respond to these parenting styles.

DISCUSSION

The exploration into the dynamics between parenting styles and coping strategies among children of single parents revealed intricate correlations and predictive patterns that align with and, in some instances, diverge from prior research. The significant positive correlation identified between permissive and authoritarian parenting styles resonates with the findings of earlier studies (48-49), suggesting a convergence in certain characteristics inherent to these styles. Contrarily, no significant relationship was found between permissive and authoritative parenting styles, nor between authoritative and authoritarian styles. This lack of correlation can be attributed to the fundamentally divergent characteristics that define these parenting approaches (50-52), underscoring the nuanced spectrum of parenting behaviors and their varied impacts on child development.

The analysis further revealed that coping strategies such as seeking guidance and acceptance or resignation were significantly positively correlated with the permissive parenting style, a relationship underpinned by the permissive style's hallmark of high responsiveness coupled with low demands (53). This finding is corroborated by previous research linking permissive parenting with an increased propensity for seeking guidance (54,55) and acceptance or resignation (56,57), thus illustrating the potential psychological pathways through which parenting styles influence coping mechanisms in children.

Regression analysis unveiled that logical analysis, positive reappraisal, and problem-solving strategies emerged as significant predictors of coping strategies, reinforcing the multifaceted nature of the coping process and its susceptibility to various influences including parenting styles (Tables 3 and 4). These results echo the assertions of earlier studies which identified logical analysis (58, 59), positive reappraisal (60,61), and problem-solving (62,63) as crucial determinants of coping strategies, thereby affirming the predictive validity of these coping mechanisms in the context of parental influence.

Among the parenting styles examined, only the permissive style was found to be a significant predictor of avoidant coping strategies, a finding that finds support in the literature (64-66), highlighting the nuanced impact of parental permissiveness on the development of coping behaviors that may be characterized by avoidance.

Gender-based comparisons revealed that female children of single parents scored significantly higher than their male counterparts in coping strategies such as positive reappraisal, seeking guidance or support, acceptance or resignation, and emotional discharge. This gender disparity is supported by prior research which suggests that females may exhibit a greater tendency towards using positive reappraisal (67-69), seeking guidance (69,70), acceptance or resignation (71,72), and emotional discharge (69,73) as coping mechanisms. Conversely, no significant differences were observed in parenting styles between male and female children, a finding that aligns with existing research indicating the absence of gender bias in the perception of parenting styles (74).

This study's findings elucidate the complex interplay between parenting styles and coping strategies among children of single parents, contributing valuable insights into the psychological underpinnings of child development in single-parent families. While the study bolsters the body of literature with its nuanced examination of these dynamics within the Pakistani cultural context, it is not without limitations. The reliance on self-report measures, for instance, introduces the potential for response bias, and the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs to track the evolution of coping strategies over time and the incorporation of qualitative methods to capture the depth of the parent-child dynamic.

Moreover, the implications of this research extend beyond academic interest, offering practical guidance for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers in designing interventions tailored to the needs of single-parent families. By highlighting the critical role of parenting styles in shaping children's coping mechanisms, this study underscores the importance of supporting single parents in adopting parenting approaches that foster psychological resilience in their children. In doing so, it paves the way for more informed, evidence-based strategies aimed at enhancing the mental health and well-being of both single parents and their children.

CONCLUSION

The investigation into the interplay between parenting styles and coping strategies among children of single parents underscores the profound influence of parental behaviors on child development. Findings reveal that permissive parenting correlates with certain coping strategies, emphasizing the need for awareness and guidance for single parents in fostering adaptive coping mechanisms in their offspring. This study not only enriches the existing body of knowledge on parent-child dynamics in single-parent families but also carries significant implications for human healthcare, suggesting that interventions tailored to support single parents could enhance psychological resilience and mental health outcomes for both parents and children. By addressing these dynamics, healthcare providers can contribute to healthier family environments, ultimately benefiting societal mental health and well-being.

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