

Perceived parenting styles and primary attachment styles of single and children living with both parents

Mehr-un-Nisa Idrees, Syeda Mehreen Zahra, Fatima Naeem

Abstract

Objective: To investigate the association between perceived primary parenting styles and attachment styles between single-parent children and children living with both parents.

Methods: The correlational study was conducted at the Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Pakistan, from September 2017 to March 2018, and comprised an equal number of children from single-parent families and those living with both the parents. Data was collected using the parental authority questionnaire and the Urdu version of the inventory of parental and peer attachment. Data was analysed using SPSS 21.

Results: Of the 200 children, 100(50%) were in each of the two groups, and both the groups had 50(50%) girls and boys each. The overall mean age of the sample was 14.56 ± 3.03 years (range: 11-18 years). There was a significant negative correlation between permissive parenting styles with mother's communication ($p < 0.05$); authoritarian parenting style had negative correlation with parental communication and trust ($p < 0.001$). Authoritative parenting had significant positive relationship with trust ($p < 0.001$), and communication with parents ($p < 0.001$), and there was negative relationship between authoritative parenting with feeling alienated from parents ($p < 0.01$). Single-parent children perceived their parents as authoritarian ($p < 0.001$) and had more alienated attachment with parents ($p < 0.001$), whereas children living with both the parents had more trust ($p < 0.001$) and had better communication with their parents ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: It is important to understand the role of parents and different parenting styles in building up strong parent-child attachment.

Keywords: Parenting styles, Permissive parenting style, Authoritative parenting style, Attachment styles, Authoritarian parenting style, Single parent children. (JPMA 71: 1540; 2021) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.626>

Introduction

Parents play a profoundly powerful role in their children's development. A study emphasised that parenting style influences the child's social abilities.¹ Parenting style consists of two different dimensions: parental demandingness, which describes parental control, supervision and development demands; and parental responsiveness, which describes warmth, acknowledgment and inclusion.² Diana Baumrind was the first to introduce parenting style as a process used by parents to raise their children using standard procedures.³ She identified three parenting styles: Authoritative Parenting, Authoritarian Parenting and Permissive Parenting.³

Parenting style is a procedure through which parents show warmth, love and care towards their newborn child. The outcome of the parent-child relationship is the bond / attachment the child feels with his/her parents.⁴ The term 'attachment style' refers to the way a child relates to a primary caregiver figure. This will affect his life as an adult significantly, as the child relates to others in the context of previous intimate relationships as a child. A study on

attachment styles viewed parental figures as safe / secure base for the children, defining attachment as a persisting passionate bond in an individual, which an individual forms with the caregiver.⁵

Attachment consists of two fundamental classifications: secure and insecure attachment. Insecure attachment consists of three main different types: insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent, and insecure-disorganised. Secure attachment is characterised by the toddler being safely appended to his / her parent. Such children are sure that their parents will be receptive to their needs and they can communicate with them easily. Anxious-ambivalent attachment signifies the unusually anxious and upsetting reaction of the toddler when her mother is away / not present. When she returns, the child is generally ambivalent i.e., clingy and upset with the mother at the same time. Anxious-avoidant attachment means the child maintains a distance from or disregards the caregiver, indicating little feeling when the parental figure withdraws or returns.⁶

The importance of children's attachment with the caregiver has been stressed. It has a profound impact and influence across the life-span. It influences their personal development throughout their lives. The attachment / bond the child forms with the caregiver in the early stages

Department of Psychology, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Pakistan.

Correspondence: Syeda Mehreen Zahra. e-mail: mehreensyeda@gmail.com

of life will determine the capacity to form enthusiastic interpersonal relationships and have intimate "attachment" to someone else as an adult.⁷

There has been a considerable amount of research conducted on attachment and its consequences on children's development. Parenting style has a significant relationship with the nature of mother-child attachment in various developmental stages, like middle childhood and youth. A positive association exists between authoritative parenting and secure attachment. Negligent parenting on the other hand results in avoidant attachment. Parenting style has an impact on the achievement of children as well.⁸ Researchers also found that authoritative parenting styles had a negative correlation with the academic performance of college students. Studies also suggest that there is an inter-relationship between different attachment styles and parenting styles. Harshness, yelling, shouting and threatening behaviours with children result in conduct issues, aggression, higher externalising and developing antisocial peer affiliations.⁹

Studies on parenting styles and its impact on children have also been conducted in Pakistan. One study measured the impact of parenting styles on the attachment styles of college students, showing a positive relationship between attachment styles and parenting styles.¹⁰ It also showed that there was a correlation involving parenting styles, attachment styles and social development of preschool children.¹⁰ Studies have affirmed that there is an association between the attachment styles, parenting styles and social development.¹¹ A positive association was found between parenting style and attachment styles among college students.¹² Permissive parenting style was associated with avoidant and restless attachment style. Gender difference was also observed in a study, demonstrating that higher parental attachment was found in females compared to males.¹³ In another study, relationship was found around parenting styles, attachment and responsibility styles.¹¹ A study demonstrated that permissive and authoritarian parenting styles had a significant negative impact on parental and peer attachment.¹⁴

The current study was planned to assess the association between different types of parenting and attachment styles of single-parent children and those living with both the parents.

Subjects and Methods

The cross-sectional study was conducted at the Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Pakistan, from September 2017 to March 2018. After approval from the institutional ethics review board, the sample was raised using stratified

purposive sampling technique from among children aged age 11 -18 years. Single-parent children were enrolled from a public-sector child protection agency, while those living with both the parents were enrolled from the community. All the subjects were studying in private schools and were enrolled in grades from the 5th to the 10th.

Children living with step parents were excluded.

Data was collected after obtaining informed permission from school authorities and the child-protection agency, and consent from all the participants. Permission to use data-collection tools were obtained from the authors concerned. Demographic details were noted on a personal information sheet. Participants were administered the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)¹⁵ which is a 5-point Likert scale. The Urdu version of PAQ¹⁶ was used. There were 60 items that were structured into three subscales: authoritarian style, authoritative style, and permissive parenting style. The coefficient of reliability for the present sample among all three types of parenting styles were 0.83, 0.74 and 0.73 respectively.

To assess parental attachment, the Inventory of Parental and Peer Attachment (IPPA) was used.¹⁷ It is a self-reporting questionnaire scored on a 5-point likert scale, and comprising three subscales for father and mother, namely: trust, communication and alienation. The internal consistency was 0.77 for mother and 0.75 for father. The Urdu version of the inventory was used.¹⁸

Data was collected in group settings.

The sample size was determined using the ratio of the number of subjects (N) to the number of items (p), and this varies from three to five subjects per item.¹⁹

Data was analysed using SPSS 21. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to find out the relationship between parenting styles and parental attachment among single-parent children and children living with both the parents. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to find out the mean difference between two independent variables, like gender, single and both-parent groups, and two dependent variables; parenting and attachment styles. Independent sample t-test was used to find out the mean difference in the perception of parenting styles and parental attachment among single-parent children and children living with both the parents. Also, t-test was used for homogeneity of variance assessed through Levene's test of equality of variance. Missing data was handled using the option of exclude cases pairwise. MANOVA was also used to find out the mean difference between two independent variables. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for

Table-1: Inter factor correlation. Table of correlation in which the values of two samples are present Mean and Standard deviation of scores of children with single parents and both parented children on Parental Authority Questionnaire and Parental Attachment Inventory.

Variables	PSS	AUT	AUTH	MT	MC	MA	FT	FC	FA
PPS	-	0.52**	0.43**	0.16*	-0.20**	-0.08	-0.02	-0.08	-0.13*
AUT	0.52**	-	0.67**	-0.46**	-0.45**	-0.06	-0.25**	-0.19**	-0.05
AUTH	0.43**	0.67**	-	-0.54**	-0.50**	0.19**	-0.31**	-0.24**	0.05
MT	0.16*	-0.46**	-0.54**	-	0.73**	-0.09	0.55**	0.37**	0.01
MC	-0.20**	-0.45**	-0.50**	0.73**	-	-0.10	0.42**	0.36**	-0.03
MA	0.08	-0.06	-0.19**	0.09	-0.10	-	-0.03	-0.03	0.59**
FT	-0.02	-0.25**	-0.3**	0.55**	0.42**	-0.03	-	0.71**	0.09
FC	0.08	-0.19**	-0.24**	0.37**	0.36**	-0.03	0.71**	-	-0.08
FA	-0.13*	-0.05**	-0.05	0.01	-0.03	0.59**	0.09	-0.08	-
Mean±SD	29.27±8.06	25.16±8.37	24.81±10.07	34.84±8.98	31.43±6.95	14.81±4.76	35.35±8.40	30.51±7.28	15.38±4.93

df=199, ***p<.001; Note: PSS= Permissive Parenting Style, AUT= Authoritarian Parenting Styles; AUTH= Authoritative Parenting Styles, MT= Mother Trust, MC= Mother Communication, MA=Mother Alienation, FT=Father Trust, FC=Father Communication, FA=Father Alienation

normality, linearity using scatter plot, outliers using Mahalanobis distance test, and singularity and multi-collinearity using correlation analysis.

Results

Of the 200 children, 100(50%) were in each of the two groups, and both the groups had 50(50%) girls and boys each. The overall mean age of the sample was 14.56±3.03 years (range: 11-18 years).

There was non-significant negative correlation of permissive parenting style with trust on mother and father, alienation with mother and father and communication with father (p>0.05). There was a small significant negative correlation between

permissive parenting style with mother communication; moderate to small negative correlation between authoritarian parenting style with mother and father communication, and trust on mother and father (p<0.05). There was a non-significant relationship between authoritarian parenting style and feeling alienated from mother and father (p>0.05). Authoritative parenting had significant moderate to large positive relationship with trust on mother and father, communication with father and mother, and a small negative relationship between authoritative parenting with feeling alienated from the mother (Table 1).

Single-parent children perceived their parents as authoritarian and had more alienated attachment with mother and father, whereas children living with both the parents perceived their parents as more authoritative, had more trust on both the parents and were better able to

Table-2: Means, Standard Deviations, t and p-values of Children of Single and Both Parents on Parental Authority Questionnaire and Parental Attachment Inventory.

	Single Parented Children Mean±SD	Both Parented Children Mean±SD	t-test	p-value
Permissive Parenting Styles	29.90±7.44	28.65±8.63	1.09	0.27(ns)
Authoritarian Parenting Styles	27.68±8.50	22.65±7.46	4.44	0.001***
Authoritative/Flexible Parenting Styles	21.55±8.30	28.07±10.32	5.64	0.001***
Mother Trust	30.79±8.77	38.89±7.22	7.12	0.001***
Mother Communication	29.14±7.21	33.72±5.88	4.921	0.001***
Mother Alienation	16.02±3.99	13.60±5.16	3.70	0.001***
Father Trust	32.18±8.26	38.52±7.30	5.74	0.001***
Father Communication	29.53±6.50	31.50±7.89	1.92	0.056(ns)
Father Alienation	16.44±4.00	14.32±5.53	3.10	0.002**

***p<.001

Table-3: MANOVA for Gender Differences of Children of Single and Both Parents on Parental Authority Questionnaire and Parental Attachment Inventory.

	Single Parent		Both Parents		F	p-value
	Boy Mean±SD	Girl Mean±SD	Boy Mean±SD	Girl Mean±SD		
Per	29.70±7.64	30.10±7.31	27.26±10.81	30.10±7.31	2652.71	0.001***
Author	27.44±8.19	27.92±8.88	22.58±8.77	22.72±5.95	1958.65	0.001***
Auth	28.32±7.90	28.78±8.76	21.14±12.70	21.00±7.34	1388.04	0.001***
MT	29.62±8.59	31.96±8.88	39.72±7.29	38.06±7.12	2791.85	0.001***
MC	29.44±6.56	28.84±7.85	34.20±6.40	33.24±5.32	3781.56	0.001***
MA	16.14±3.89	15.90±4.12	13.62±5.36	13.58±5.01	4533.22	0.001***
FT	31.98±7.95	32.38±8.64	39.42±7.20	37.62±7.35	2038.16	0.001***
FC	28.62±6.78	30.44±6.15	34.02±6.75	28.98±8.20	4097.56	0.001***
FA	16.48±4.14	16.40±3.90	14.46±5.93	14.18±5.16	3787.24	0.001***

df=199, ***p<.001; Per= permissive parenting style, Aut= Authoritarian Parenting Style, Auth= Authoritative Parenting Style, MT= Mother Trust, MC= Mother Communication, Mother Alienation, FT=Father Trust, FC=Father Communication, FA= Father Alienation.

communicate with the mother (p<0.05). No significant difference was found in perceiving their parents as permissive among single-parent children and children living with both the parents (Table 2).

There was a significant difference between males and females on perceived parenting and attachment styles of children living with single and both parents (Table 3).

Discussion

Attachment with the caregiver is a deep-rooted basic need and has the capacity to shape and sculpt an individual.²⁰ This attachment has a long-lasting impact on a child's progress and development. Child-parent attachment generalises to other relationship-specific domains, like partners, close friends, romantic partners, teachers, etc. Many studies have highlighted the impact of parenting and attachment styles with respect to academic performance, and mental health problems etc.²¹

Forming a close bond and depicting different attachment behaviour is dependent on the context. The findings of the current study showed that there was a negative relationship between permissive and authoritarian parenting styles with parental communication and trust. Authoritative parenting had positive relationship with parental communication and trust and negative relationship with feeling alienated from parents. Studies have indicated a positive association between authoritative parenting and secure attachment, whereas negligent parenting predicted avoidant attachment.²² Children of divorced parents manifest lower well-being and functioning than their peers, function less well at school, and exhibit more behavioural problems and emotional problems, like anxiety, depression, low self-esteem.²³

Another important finding of the current study was that single-parent children perceived their parents as authoritarian and had more alienated attachment with parents, whereas children living with both the parents perceived their parents to be more authoritative, but had more trust and better communication with their parents. The study supports the fact that increase in the social demands of society makes single parents more prone to psychological distress, which, in turn, adversely affects their parental functioning.²⁴ In many cultures, women are largely responsible for upbringing of their children after a divorce. Constant exposure to stress, decline in the standard of living, and financial pressures make them vulnerable to mental and physical health problems, compelling them to use more harsh disciplinary methods, such as corporal punishment. This is due to their need to control their children's behaviour against the backdrop of tough life conditions and to protect them from harsh realities of life. Secondly, single mothers exert harsh discipline and control to maintain their parental authority which is due to lack of time, absence of financial support, lack of patience, the need for practical help and emotional support or the fear of losing the children.²⁴

The current study also highlighted gender differences in parenting styles and attachment styles in single-parent and

both-parent children. Studies also support the fact that culturally determined social development practices might explain gender differences in children's behaviour living with single parents. Boys exhibited more externalising problems and less competence, conduct disorders, higher dropout rates of high school, poor impulse control, and aggression, whereas girls show more depression and psychosomatic problems.²⁵

The current study is useful in determining children's behaviour associated with parenting style. Further studies should be taken into consideration in different cultures and social setups.

The current study has its limitations. It was a cross-sectional study which did not touch long-term effects that a longitudinal study would have done. In addition, only urban population was part of the sample, which meant absence of comparison between urban and rural populations. Finally, variables like mental health; bullying, post-traumatic stress was not studied.

Conclusion

Parents' positive practices, like sensitivity, responsiveness and consideration, towards their youngsters strongly affected their mental prosperity.

Disclaimer: The text is based on an MSc thesis.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Source of Funding: None.

References

1. Baumrind D. Differentiating between confrontive and coercive kinds of parental power-assertive disciplinary practices. *Hum Develop* 2012; 55: 35-51.
2. Maccoby EE, Martin JA. Socialization in the context of the family: parent-child interaction. *Handbook of Child Psychology: Socialization, Personality and Social Development*; 1983.
3. Baumrind D. Child care practices anteceding three patterns of preschool behavior. *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 1967; 75: 43-88.
4. Weiten W, Lloyd MA. *Psychology Applied to Modern Life*. Singapore: Thomson Learning Inc; 2004.
5. Ainsworth MD, Bell SM. Attachment, exploration, and separation: Illustrated by the behavior of one-year-olds in a strange situation. *Child Dev* 1970; 56: 56-67.
6. Rayan KO. *Attachment relationship: Nurturing healthy bonds*. Chicago: Learning Seed; 2010.
7. Bowlby J. *Attachment and loss: Attachment*. New York: Basic Books; 1969.
8. Yahaya A, Nordin K. Relationship between self-concepts, motivation, and parenting styles effected students achievements. [Unpublished Dissertation]. Malaysia: University Technology of Malaysia; 2006.
9. Hoskins DH. Consequences of parenting on adolescent outcomes. 2014; 4 : 506-531.
10. Akhter Z. The effect of parenting styles of parents on the attachment styles of undergraduates students. *Language in India: Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow* 2012; 12: 555-66.

11. Ahmadpour M. Assessment the relationship between parenting styles, parents attachment styles and social development among pre- school children. *J Bas and App Sci Res* 2013; 3: 97-103. [not found]
 12. Ali M. Impact of parental attachment on aggressive behaviour of adolescents. [Unpublished Dissertation]. Islamabad: Pakistan: National Institute of psychology, Quaid-i- Azam University; 2008.
 13. Imtiaz S, Naqvi I. Parental Attachment and Identity Styles among Adolescents: Moderating Role of Gender. *Pak J Psychol Res* 2012; 27: 241-64.
 14. Safdar S, Zahrah SM. Impact of Parenting Styles on the Intensity of Parental and Peer Attachment: Exploring the Gender Differences in Adolescents. *Am J Appl Psychol* 2016; 4: 23-30.
 15. Buri JR. Parental authority Questionnaire. *J Personality Assessment* 1991; 57:110-9.
 16. Babree S. Aggressive and non-aggressive children perception of parental acceptance-rejection and control. [Unpublished M. Phil dissertation]. Islamabad: National institute of psychology, Quaid -i- Azam University; 1997.
 17. Armsden GC, Greenberg MT. The inventory of parental and peer attachment: Relationship to well-being in adolescence. *J Youth Adolesc* 1978; 16: 427-54.
 18. Zafar H. Emotional autonomy, attachment styles and self-efficacy in adolescents. [Dissertation] Islamabad: National Institution of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University; 2009.
 19. Cattell R. The scientific use of factor analysis in behavioral and life sciences. New York: Plenum press; 1978.
 20. Kerns KA, Brumariu LE. Is insecure parent-child attachment a risk factor for the development of anxiety in childhood or adolescence? *Child Dev Perspect* 2014; 8: 12-7.
 21. Savage J. The association between attachment, parental bonds and physically aggressive and violent behavior: A comprehensive review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 2014; 19: 164-78.
 22. Marco A, Jaap D. Effects of Divorce on Children's Educational Attainment in a Mediterranean and Catholic Society Evidence from Italy. *European Societies* 2009; 11: 137-59.
 23. Jones DJ, Zalot AA, Foster SE, Sterrett E, Chestern C. A review of child-rearing in African American single mother families: the relevance of a coparenting framework. *J Child Fam Stud* 2007, 16: 671-83.
 24. Amato PR. Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *J Marriage and Family* 2010; 72: 650-66.
 25. Lazar A, Guttman J, Abas L. Parental authority in divorced families. *J Divorce & Remarriage* 2009; 50: 356-68.
-