



Perceived Parenting Styles and Mental Well-Being Among University Students

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Abstract

This study explored the relationship between perceived parenting styles—Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Neglectful—and the mental well-being of university students. It aimed to determine which parenting style best predicts stress, anxiety, and self-esteem outcomes. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design, a sample of 450 undergraduate students ($M = 20.1$, $SD = 1.8$) from a large public university completed the Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Regression and ANOVA analyses revealed that the Authoritative parenting style significantly predicted higher self-esteem ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) and lower stress ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$), whereas the Neglectful style predicted increased stress ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$) and reduced self-esteem ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .01$). ANOVA confirmed significant differences in self-esteem across the four parenting styles, with Authoritative parenting linked to the most positive outcomes. These findings underscore the continuing influence of early family dynamics on university students' psychological adjustment, providing implications for family education and student counseling programs.

Keywords: Perceived Parenting Styles, Mental Well-Being, University Students



Introduction

Parenting style is one of the most enduring predictors of psychological and social outcomes throughout life. Introduced by Baumrind (1967), the four prototypical parenting styles—Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Neglectful—represent distinct constellations of responsiveness and demandingness that shape children's personality and well-being. Research across cultures consistently demonstrates that parenting style not only molds childhood behavior but also exerts long-lasting effects into emerging adulthood, particularly influencing self-concept, emotional resilience, and stress regulation (Steinberg, 2001; Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

University life often presents significant emotional and cognitive challenges. Academic workload, social adjustment, financial constraints, and autonomy development collectively elevate stress levels (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). In this context, early parental socialization patterns remain psychologically salient. Perceived parental warmth, communication, and autonomy support continue to influence how young adults cope with these pressures, affecting mental well-being outcomes such as stress, self-esteem, and anxiety (Lone, 2025; Park et al., 2016). Self-esteem, a fundamental component of mental well-being, reflects an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Numerous studies show that Authoritative parenting—characterized by warmth, structure, and autonomy support—is strongly linked to higher self-esteem in adolescents and young adults (Milevsky et al., 2007). In contrast, Authoritarian and Neglectful styles are associated with self-doubt, insecurity, and low self-efficacy (Lamborn et al., 1991). The balanced approach of authoritative parents' fosters internalized confidence, encouraging students to face academic and social challenges with optimism.

Stress, defined as the psychological and physiological response to perceived demands exceeding coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), is prevalent among university populations. Parental expectations and emotional regulation models internalized during childhood influence stress reactivity in adulthood. Students perceiving their parents as Authoritative often exhibit healthier coping strategies and emotional regulation skills (Cutrona et al., 1994). Conversely, those recalling Neglectful or Authoritarian upbringing may lack emotional resilience, predisposing them to heightened stress and anxiety (McKinney & Renk, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon Baumrind's (1971) parenting typology and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-Determination Theory posits that autonomy-supportive environments foster intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being. Authoritative parenting aligns with these principles by balancing control with autonomy. Conversely, Neglectful parenting undermines basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy, predisposing individuals to poor mental health outcomes. While extensive research has examined parenting styles in adolescence, fewer studies have addressed their enduring impact on mental well-being during university years—a developmental period marked by independence and identity exploration. Moreover, cultural variations in parental expectations and emotional communication may moderate these relationships. This study therefore investigates the association between perceived parenting styles and mental well-being indicators (stress and self-esteem) among university students.



Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between perceived parenting styles and mental well-being (stress and self-esteem) among university students.
2. To determine which parenting style predicts positive mental health outcomes.
3. To compare mean self-esteem and stress levels across different parenting style groups.

Hypotheses

1. Authoritative parenting will predict higher self-esteem and lower perceived stress.
2. Neglectful and Authoritarian parenting will predict lower self-esteem and higher perceived stress.
3. Significant mean differences in self-esteem and stress will exist among students perceiving different parental styles.

Method

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, suitable for assessing associations between variables at a single time point.

Participants

A total of 450 undergraduate students ($N = 450$; 240 females, 210 males) participated, aged 18–24 years ($M = 20.1$, $SD = 1.8$). Participants were enrolled in various disciplines at a large public university. Inclusion criteria included being full-time undergraduate students and living away from home for at least one semester to ensure retrospective evaluation of parenting. A convenience sampling method was used, selecting participants from psychology, management, and social sciences departments.

Instruments

1. **Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ)** (Robinson et al., 1995): Measures perceived parental behaviors across four styles—Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Neglectful. Internal consistency for subscales ranged from $\alpha = .78$ to $.86$.
2. **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983)**: A 10-item scale measuring perceived stress in the past month. Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$.
3. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965)**: A 10-item scale assessing global self-worth. Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$ in this sample.
4. **Demographic Sheet**: Included age, gender, department, and family structure.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. Data collection took place during class hours with instructors' permission. Participants were briefed about the voluntary nature of participation and confidentiality. The survey took approximately 20 minutes. Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 26. Data were analyzed using:

- Descriptive Statistics (Means, SDs)
- Pearson Correlation to assess associations between parenting styles and mental well-being.
- Multiple Regression to identify predictors of self-esteem and stress.
- One-way ANOVA to compare self-esteem levels across the four parenting style categories.



Results

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Study Variables (N = 450)*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Authoritative	3.45	0.62	—					
2. Authoritarian	2.86	0.71	-.42**	—				
3. Permissive	2.93	0.58	.19**	-.27**	—			
4. Neglectful	2.21	0.66	-.34**	.41**	.18*	—		
5. Self-Esteem	27.84	4.92	.52**	-.44**	.11	-.33**	—	
6. Perceived Stress	21.37	6.14	-.48**	.46**	-.09	.51**	-.57**	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Correlations revealed strong positive links between Authoritative parenting and self-esteem and strong negative links with stress. Conversely, Neglectful parenting correlated positively with stress and negatively with self-esteem.

Table 2: *Multiple Regression Predicting Self-Esteem and Perceived Stress from Parenting Styles*

Predictor	Self-Esteem (β)	t	p	Perceived Stress (β)	t	p
Authoritative	.42	8.12	< .001	-.35	-6.97	< .001
Authoritarian	-.28	-5.24	< .01	.30	5.11	< .001
Permissive	.10	1.87	.062	-.06	-1.12	.260
Neglectful	-.29	-4.89	< .01	.51	9.21	< .001
R ²	.39			.43		

Note. Dependent variables: Self-Esteem (left model), Perceived Stress (right model). All predictors entered simultaneously.

Regression analysis demonstrated that Authoritative parenting positively predicted self-esteem ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) and negatively predicted perceived stress ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$). Neglectful parenting was the strongest positive predictor of perceived stress ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$) and a negative predictor of self-esteem ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .01$). The models explained 39% and 43% of the variance in self-esteem and stress respectively.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between perceived parenting styles and mental well-being among university students. Consistent with the hypotheses, Authoritative parenting emerged as the strongest predictor of positive mental well-being, while Neglectful parenting predicted poorer outcomes. These results align with prior findings that supportive, responsive, and structured parenting promotes psychological resilience, whereas neglectful or harsh parenting fosters maladjustment (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Milevsky et al., 2007). The strong positive link between Authoritative parenting and self-esteem underscores the role of parental warmth and autonomy support in fostering self-worth. Authoritative parents provide balanced emotional guidance and behavioral expectations, allowing children to internalize competence and value (Steinberg et al., 1994). The negative association between Authoritarian and Neglectful parenting and self-esteem supports the view that coercive control or emotional neglect undermines self-confidence, consistent with research by McKinney and Renk (2008).

Results revealed that Authoritative parenting predicted lower stress levels, whereas Neglectful parenting predicted higher stress. This supports the buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), which posits that social and emotional resources reduce the impact



of stressors. Students raised in supportive environments likely possess superior coping mechanisms and emotional regulation skills. In contrast, neglect or overcontrol in upbringing may leave individuals ill-equipped to handle academic and social pressures (Ehsan, 2025). In collectivist societies, such as many in South Asia, Authoritarian parenting is sometimes viewed as normative (Chao, 1994). However, this study suggests that even within such contexts, perceived Authoritative parenting—balancing control with warmth—yields better psychological outcomes. Thus, parenting education programs should promote autonomy-supportive practices without compromising family cohesion.

Implications

These findings have implications for both *preventive counseling* and *family education*. University counseling centers could include family dynamics assessments during intake to identify students vulnerable due to adverse parenting histories. Workshops aimed at parents may emphasize the long-term benefits of Authoritative communication and emotional responsiveness. Moreover, integrating psychoeducational modules on emotional regulation for students from Neglectful or Authoritarian backgrounds could mitigate stress. Further research could explore mediating mechanisms such as emotion regulation, resilience, or attachment security in explaining how parenting styles influence adult mental health. Qualitative interviews may provide richer insights into students' subjective interpretations of their parents' behavior.

Limitations

The study's cross-sectional nature limits causal inference. Self-report measures are susceptible to recall and social desirability biases. Additionally, the convenience sample from a single university limits generalizability across cultural or socioeconomic contexts. Future longitudinal and cross-cultural studies are recommended.

Conclusion

This study confirms that perceived parenting styles continue to exert a profound influence on university students' mental well-being. Authoritative parenting promotes higher self-esteem and lower stress, reflecting adaptive internalization of early emotional support and autonomy. Neglectful parenting, conversely, contributes to vulnerability and psychological distress. These findings advocate for culturally adaptive parenting interventions and university mental health initiatives that recognize the lasting power of early familial relationships in shaping adult well-being.

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