

Parenting Styles in Single-Parent Families and Their Association with Borderline Personality Disorder Traits in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Parenting styles play a vital role in the development of emotional and personality traits, especially in single-parent families with high levels of psychosocial adversity. This study examines the relationship between parenting styles and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) traits in young adulthood. Based on attachment theory and the biosocial model, poor parenting styles, in the form of neglect and control, are expected to play a role in emotion dysregulation and personality vulnerabilities (Crowell, Beauchaine, & Linehan, 2009; Steele, Townsend, & Grenyer, 2019). A quantitative cross-sectional method was used to study 200 single-parented young adults (18-25 years old).

Parenting styles and BPD traits were measured using standardized measures. Data analysis methods included reliability, correlation, independent sample t-test, ANOVA and regression. Authoritative parenting was found to have a negative association with BPD traits, while authoritarian and neglectful parenting had a positive association. Results of regression analysis revealed that parenting styles significantly predicted BPD traits (48% variance). Findings suggest adaptive parenting styles are crucial for minimizing psychological risks in at-risk groups.

Introduction

Parenting is a critical factor in the development of psychological, emotional and behavioural adjustment. Over the past few decades, a rise in single parenthood has raised concerns about the outcomes for child development due to specific socio-economic and emotional challenges (Amato, 2010). Single parents may face elevated stress levels, financial pressures, and a lack of social support, which could influence parenting styles and ultimately impact children's psychological outcomes.

Baumrind (1991) identified parenting styles as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful. The authoritative style, which includes warmth and moderate control,

is linked with positive psychological outcomes, including emotional regulation and social skills (Baumrind, 1991). By contrast, authoritarian and neglectful parenting is associated with poor psychological adjustment, such as externalising and internalising behaviours (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a serious psychological disorder characterised by emotional, identity and relationship instability (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). There is evidence that early family factors, such as parenting and attachment, play a pivotal role in the development of BPD symptoms (Bowlby, 1988). Patients with BPD commonly report a history of neglect, inconsistency and invalidation in childhood (Winsper et al., 2012).

It is acknowledged that parenting is one of the most critical factors contributing to an individual's psychological, emotional and social development. Parenting and parent-child relationships are significant factors in determining long-term psychological functioning (Baumrind, 1991). There has been a marked increase in single-parent families in recent years, both globally and in developing nations like Pakistan. This trend has sparked a growing interest in examining the impact of parenting in single-parent families on children's development (Amato, 2010).

These families may face specific stressors, such as economic pressures, role strain, lack of supervision, and social support. These factors can affect parenting practices and lead to less desirable parenting styles (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). These stressors may influence single parents to engage in more inconsistently responsive parenting styles, which may have adverse effects on children's emotional and psychological development (Demo & Acock, 1996).

Parenting styles, as defined by Baumrind (1991), are broadly divided into four styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful. Authoritative parenting, which involves high levels of warmth and responsiveness, as well as a moderate level of control, is associated with the most beneficial outcomes, including emotional stability, self-control and positive social adjustment. Authoritarian parenting, which is high in control but low in responsiveness, is associated with anxiety, low self-esteem and poor emotional expression. Permissive parenting (high responsiveness, low control) can result in impulsivity and low self-control, and neglectful parenting (low responsiveness, low control) is linked with the worst outcomes, such as emotional neglect and delinquency (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a serious mental disorder defined by instability in moods, relationships, self-identity and behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). BPD sufferers can suffer from extreme emotional fluctuations, abandonment fears, impulsiveness and relationship instability. In particular, BPD is not just influenced by genetic factors, but also strongly shaped by environmental factors, especially parenting and early childhood experiences (Crowell, Beauchaine, & Linehan, 2009).

According to the biosocial model of BPD, the disorder is caused by the interaction of emotional vulnerability and an invalidating environment (Linehan, 1993; Crowell et al., 2009). An invalidating environment is one in which a child's emotional expressions are dismissed, neglected or punished. These environments are often linked to poor parenting, such as neglect, inconsistent parenting, and punitive parenting. Such experiences preclude the development of emotion regulation skills,

and result in the symptoms of BPD.

Theoretically, attachment theory also supports the link between parenting and BPD. Bowlby (1988) proposed that early attachment with parents influences how a person can regulate their emotions and establish stable relationships. Inconsistent and neglectful parenting, which may lead to insecure attachment, has been consistently associated with BPD traits (Agrawal et al., 2004).

There is empirical evidence to support the link between parenting and BPD traits. For example, people with BPD often report low parental warmth, high parental control, and parental neglect (Winsper et al., 2012). Moreover, parenting styles characterised by abuse, neglect and inconsistent parenting have been found to be important risk factors for the development of personality pathology (Steele, Townsend, & Grenyer, 2019).

Objectives

To examine parenting styles in single-parent families

To assess BPD traits in young adults

To analyze the relationship between parenting styles and BPD traits

To determine predictive effects of parenting styles on BPD traits

Hypotheses

H1: Parenting styles significantly correlate with BPD traits

H2: There are gender differences in BPD traits

H3: Parenting styles significantly predict BPD traits

Literature Review

Numerous studies have established links between parenting and mental health. Baumrind (1991) found that authoritative parenting fosters the development of emotional regulation skills and resilience, and authoritarian and neglectful parenting result in poor outcomes. This research has been replicated to demonstrate the association between dysfunctional parenting and personality disorders.

Steele et al. (2019) reviewed the literature, showing childhood maltreatment, neglect, and inconsistent parenting are risk factors for BPD. Winsper et al. (2012) also report that people with BPD traits report high levels of parental control or neglect and low levels of parental warmth, suggesting poor parenting practices.

Further, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) clarifies the impact of early caregiver interactions on emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships. Insecure attachment styles, which can be caused by inconsistent parenting, are particularly linked to BPD traits. Also, Crowell et al. (2009) highlighted that emotionally invalidating parenting leads to emotional dysregulation, which is a feature of BPD.

Other studies also suggest a link between parenting stress and low parental competence and poor child outcomes (Steele et al., 2020). These stressors might be exacerbated in single parent families, which could lead to problematic parenting behaviours.

The link between parenting styles and psychological adjustment has long been investigated in the fields of developmental and clinical psychology. Baumrind's (1991) pioneering research demonstrated the impact of parenting styles on children's

emotional and behavioural outcomes. Authoritative parenting is associated with positive outcomes, such as higher self-esteem, emotional regulation and social skills. By contrast, authoritarian and neglectful parenting has been associated with various forms of psychopathology, such as aggression, anxiety and emotional dysregulation (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the contribution of parenting to the development of personality disorders, including Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). In a recent review, Steele et al. (2019) noted that childhood maltreatment, neglect and dysfunctional parenting, are all strongly linked with BPD. This evidence indicates the family environment is important in the development of personality disorders.

Crowell et al's (2009) biosocial model offers a theoretical explanation for the development of BPD. This model proposes that persons with a biological vulnerability to emotional dysregulation are at greater risk of developing BPD in the presence of invalidating environments. Parents who invalidate emotional expression and may punish their child's emotional expression result in difficulties regulating emotions, a key component of BPD.

This link is also supported by attachment theory, which highlights the role of early parenting in emotional development. Bowlby (1988) posited that secure attachment facilitates healthy emotional development, but insecure attachment results in emotional dysregulation and relationship difficulties. Research has shown that BPD patients are more likely to have insecure attachment (Agrawal et al., 2004).

Winsper et al. (2012) reviewed studies on the association between parenting and BPD, and found that the lack of parental warmth and the presence of parental control were commonly linked to BPD symptoms. Likewise, Johnson and colleagues (2006) found that harsh and inconsistent parenting in childhood was significantly related to personality disorders in adulthood.

Furthermore, research has shown that parental stress and incompetence are related to poor child outcomes. Steele et al. (2020) reported that high levels of parenting stress predict dysfunctional parenting behaviours, which predict child psychological problems. This is especially so in single-parent families, which tend to experience greater levels of stress because of financial and social pressures.

Research on single-parent families indicates children from these families may have more emotional and behavioural difficulties than children from two-parent families (Amato, 2010). But it is worth mentioning that not all single-parent families are unhealthy; rather, parenting quality is more important than family structure.

Methodology

Research Design

In the current study, a quantitative, cross-sectional design was used to investigate the association between parenting styles and borderline personality disorder traits in single-parent families of young adults. This approach was deemed suitable in that it enables the statistical testing of the associations between variables at a single point in time (Creswell, 2014).

Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

Sample

A sample of 200 young adults (18-25 years) who had grown up in single parent homes was recruited. Convenience sampling was used to recruit the participants owing to convenience and time restrictions. This approach reduces the ability to generalise, but is common in psychological research at the exploratory stage.

Instruments

We used validated self-report measures. We measured parenting styles using an adapted version of Baumrind's Parenting Style Questionnaire (Baumrind, 1991), which assesses authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting. Borderline personality traits were assessed using a questionnaire based on DSM-5 diagnostic criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), which includes symptoms of emotional dysregulation, impulsivity, and relationship problems.

Data Collection

The data were analyzed using SPSS. Cronbach's alpha (Nunnally, 1978) was used to assess the reliability of scales. Correlations between variables were investigated using Pearson correlation. Independent t-tests were used to examine gender differences, and ANOVA to examine group differences. Lastly, regression analysis was used to predict the role of parenting styles in predicting BPD traits.

Results

Table 4.1 Reliability

Scale	Items	Cronbach Alpha
Parenting Styles	20	0.87
BPD Traits	15	0.89

The findings of the study showed that all the measures used had high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha above the acceptable limit of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). This suggests the tools were consistent and could be used in subsequent testing.

Table 4.2

Correlation analysis

Variables	BPD Traits
Authoritative	-0.45**
Authoritarian	0.52**
Permissive	0.30*
Neglectful	0.60**

Results of the correlation analysis revealed a strong negative association between authoritative parenting and BPD traits, indicating that warm and responsive parenting is protective. However, authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles showed a positive association with BPD traits, suggesting that harsh parenting and emotional neglect are linked to personality vulnerabilities. Of the parenting styles, neglectful parenting was the most positively correlated to BPD traits, underlining its negative effects

Table 4.3

Independent samples t-test

Gender	Mean	SD	t	p
Male	45.2	8.1	2.10	.03
Female	48.7	7.5		

The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant gender difference in BPD traits, with females scoring higher than males. This finding is consistent with existing literature indicating a higher prevalence of BPD traits among females (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Table 4.4

ANOVA

Source	F	p
Between Groups	4.25	.01

The ANOVA results indicated significant differences in BPD traits across different parenting styles, suggesting that the type of parenting experienced plays a crucial role in shaping psychological outcomes.

Table 4.5

Regression analysis

Predictor	Beta	t	p
Authoritative	-0.30	-4.2	.001
Authoritarian	0.35	5.1	.000
Neglectful	0.40	6.2	.000

Regression analysis further demonstrated that parenting styles significantly predicted BPD traits, accounting for 48% of the variance. Neglectful parenting emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by authoritarian parenting, while authoritative parenting showed a negative predictive effect. These findings support the hypothesis that parenting styles are significant determinants of borderline personality traits.

Discussion

This study adds robust empirical evidence to the literature on the impact of parenting styles on borderline personality traits in young adults from single-parent families. In line with prior studies, we found that authoritative parenting was protective, while authoritarian and neglectful parenting were associated with higher BPD traits (Steele et al., 2019).

The significant link between neglectful parenting and BPD traits underscores the importance of parental support and responsiveness. This result is consistent with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) that stresses the importance of a secure attachment to avoid emotional dysregulation and interpersonal problems.

The findings also are consistent with the biosocial theory of BPD (Crowell et al., 2009), which proposes that emotionally invalidating environments lead to emotional dysregulation. The stresses and resource constraints of single-parent families may create these environments, predisposing to poor outcomes.

Additionally, the gender differences found are in line with previous research that

suggests females experience higher rates of BPD (APA, 2013). This could be the result of both genetic and environmental factors that affect emotional processing and vulnerability.

Implications

The research has implications for mental health practitioners and policymakers. Programs that target parenting in single parents should be created to strengthen authoritative parenting styles. Also, identifying and providing psychological intervention for at-risk individuals can prevent the development of personality disorders.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research is cross-sectional, and causality cannot be established. Also, the use of self-report measures could be biased. Longitudinal studies and more diverse samples should be used in future studies to improve representativeness.

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Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

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