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Review Article
Parenting Dimensions and Adolescent Perceptions at the Root of Adolescent Behaviors

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Abstract

The role of parents in the social and emotional development of their children was considered a given until research began to delve into its varied facets. Baumrind D., has described three types of parenting namely, authoritarian, authoritative and permissive which was further elaborated by Maccoby and Martin, who described the concepts of 'Demandingness' and 'Responsiveness'. Demandingness alludes to 'parental behavioral control' while 'responsiveness' corresponds to the dimension of 'parental warmth and supportiveness'. How adolescents perceive these practices, the understanding of adolescents in terms of legitimacy of parents to enforce controlling behaviors and the influence of these practices on adolescent behaviors is the focus of this review. The review delves into the theoretical foundations as well as research evidence of how parenting dimensions and adolescent perceptions may influence adolescent behaviors.

Key words: Parenting dimensions, adolescent behaviors, delinquency, legitimacy

Competing Interest: The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Data Availability: All relevant data are within the paper and its supporting information files.

INTRODUCTION

Society is dynamic in nature and changes in society often percolates from the basic family unit. The role of parents as influencing childrens' social and emotional development have been the subject matter of psychological research over the past years[1]. The style of parenting adopted by the parents in child rearing have been documented as having both short and long-term effects on parent-child relationship[2]. Baumrind D., in her seminal work on classifying parenting styles[3], described three types of parenting namely, authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Maccoby and Martin further emphasized that the combination of dimensions of parenting as 'demandingness' and 'responsiveness' gave rise to various parenting styles[1]. 'Demandingness' alludes to 'parental behavioral control' while 'responsiveness' corresponds to the dimension of 'parental warmth and supportiveness.' Among authoritarian parents, demandingness is high but responsiveness is low. It is more parent-centered and discipline tends towards aggressive measures while involvement with the child is lower. Authoritative parents share similar traits of parenting dimensions of demandingness with power assertiveness and responsiveness, however, their disciplining is not restrictive. The dimension of responsiveness with supportiveness toward autonomy of the child, leans in the direction of a more democratic type of relationship between the parent and the child[4]. The key ingredients for this are support, bi-directional and open communication between the parents and the child. On the other hand, permissive parents are highly responsive but not demanding. This parenting style is child-centered with warm and accepting parents but very low demandingness, controlling behavior and discipline[1]. The cultural milieu is also an important defining factor on the style of parenting that parents adopt and this is generally done in keeping with cultural and social norms as well as the socialization objectives for their offspring[5].

Literature dedicated to family processes, parenting beliefs, parental attitudes and practices exist however, there is a dearth of literature on how parenting practices are perceived in the growing child and the consequences that follow in the form of adolescent behaviors, especially in the global context where cultures and social structures vary. Also, contemporary threats such as risky behaviors have emerged that may lead to poor outcomes among adolescents. The purpose of this review is to gain insight into the influence of parenting behaviors related to parental care and control on adolescent perceptions and their behaviors. Parental care may include dimensions of warmth and acceptance or rejection while parental control will delve into providing adolescents with autonomy and monitoring activities including restrictions. Parenting dimensions have been described as bipolar with positive parenting practices on one end of the continuum and negative practices on the other end of the continuum[6,7]. The present review discusses two major dimensions of parental behavior including parental warmth and control while providing a theoretical base and the effects of these parenting practices as perceived by adolescents and their possible outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Inclusion criteria was designed to identify studies that were conducted previously dealing with topics in relation to parenting, its perceptions in childhood and its expressions in the form of behavioral problems and risk taking among adolescents. An attempt was made to include studies in different cultural settings, however, despite the effort, early behavioral research is predominated by Western literature.

The review has included studies that provide theoretical insight into developmental changes in a child as influenced by parenting dimensions, styles, perceptions and influence of such practices on adolescent behavior. Studies included in the review were based on the criteria that they were peer reviewed, primary research papers and were designed as cross-sectional, longitudinal or intervention studies. Studies were not included if they focused on therapeutic measures or focused on adult populations or dealt with co-morbidities among adolescents that influenced behavioral outcomes.

Four literature databases including Pubmed, Embase, PsychINFO and Cochrane Library were searched for literature covering for past literature from the selected database through to December, 2016. The key search terms included using parenting style and dimensions, adolescent perceptions, adolescent behaviors, behavioral outcomes. Only articles in English language were included in the review.

DISCUSSION

Theories of development and parenting practices: De Los Reyes and Ohannessian[7] in their review emphasized the juxtaposition of various parenting practices and family functioning that may either defend or augment the risk posed on behavioral outcomes among adolescents. Family cohesion

is, in recent literature, being understood as an important determinant of psychological adaptation in a growing child. Bronfenbenner attempted to describe the influence of various spheres that may bear influence on adolescent development through his ecological model[8]. His premise was that the immediate and distal influences on the process of development, impact the psychological well-being of the developing individual. The 'microsystem' is the immediate environment that guides development. This sphere involves interactions that the adolescent shares with his/her family, the peers, the neighborhood, the school as well as the religious community. Microsystems are often inter-linked with other external systems also known as the 'mesosystem' such as interactions that occur between two or more spheres. Outside of these immediate spheres, exo and macro systems are those influences that constitute the external environment where the growing adolescent is molded. Hence, these interactions may provide the foundations which form the basis of psychological development of an individual. How these interactions influence behaviors in children and adolescents is explored by a researchers albeit with higher representation of the Western context.

At its crux, the type of parenting and the family environment appear to bear a large influence on enhancing the developing psyche and deterring psychopathology. Lee *et al.*[9], have described the association of authoritative parenting with desirable outcomes among adolescents including better academic performance, social adjustment, higher self-esteem and less indulgence in delinquent behaviors. Optimal psychological development is observed among adolescents whose parents are warm and supportive, who also reinforce defined disciplinary boundaries including knowledge and monitoring of adolescent whereabouts[10,11]. These parenting practices characterize authoritative parenting. The opposite is known to be true with authoritarian parenting style characterized by strict and punishing parenting[9,11]. Here, the developing adolescent is unable to express autonomy and experiences restriction and rule-setting that demands compliance without adequate reasons being given by the parent. Outcomes related to this form of parenting are less than desirable with behaviors characterized by apprehensiveness or hostility[9,12], poorer pro-social behaviors[13] and increased risk taking[14] among adolescents. How these parenting practices are perceived by the developing adolescent may be a crucial determinant in influencing adolescent behaviors.

Parental warmth: Transitioning from childhood to adolescence and then into adulthood are critical phases in the development of an individual characterized by social learning as well as emotional and physical development. A shift occurs in that the adolescent vies for more autonomy and self-expression[15]. Navigating this vulnerable phase successfully may be dependent on the parent-child relationship during the early formative years. The emotional environment provided by the family during early years may influence the confidence and security that the adolescents place on their parents during the adolescent period. Literature on adolescent development emphasizes the need for secure attachment in a growing child reinforced by apt parenting practices[10]. The theory of attachment was advanced by Bowlby[16] to describe bonding and attachment behavior among humans. The responsiveness of a caregiver to a human infant provides support and reinforces that the infant will be taken care of in difficult situations. It was theorized that such behavior has an advantage in that the child grows to understand what to expect in his/her interactions with people. This could be foundational in how the child perceives relationships[16]. Nevertheless, Lewis *et al.*[17], in their study explored the nature of attachment and found it to be dynamic. Changes in family processes such as adverse events were seen to impact adolescent adjustment in spite of infant bonding with the care giver. Expression of parental warmth and responsive parenting are found to predict better outcomes in individuals[18].

The concept of parental warmth is expressed in the form of parental acceptance or rejection. As postulated by Rohner *et al.*[19], in their parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory), an individual's adjustment is dependent on perceptions of parental behaviors. Parental 'acceptance' is founded on bonds of affection and nurturance between the parent and the child. Studies have indicated that perceived parental warmth is an important determinant in reducing behavioral problems in adolescents[18-21]. The expression of spontaneous warmth was indicative of this domain rather than routine care taking. However, expressions of affection can be culture or gender specific as documented by Rohner *et al.*[19], who noted that across cultures behaviors differed between parents with some cultural preferences based on the gender of the child. Carson *et al.*[22], in their study among adolescents in the Eastern context reported that social competence was higher among adolescents whose families were more democratic toward discipline and decision-making, not enmeshed and had higher levels of communication within the family. Larson *et al.*[23], also noted that absolute authority of parents over adolescents is slowly giving way to more democratic relationships. Parental warmth also moderated the effects of certain control measures such as punishments. However, these changes were observed at a greater extent in

the West as compared to Eastern cultures[23] which may be due to dearth of literature. In the absence of warmth, punishing behavior was found to significantly influence negative adolescent outcomes including internalizing and externalizing expressions[24]. Unstable and volatile parent-child relationships may stem from emotionally unavailable parents and unsupportive family processes[21,25]. The instability created by non-marital cohabitation, divorce or other forms of transitions within the family structure have been cited by Heuveline P. *et al.*, in the context of 17 Western countries[26] to contribute to 'greater hazards' in the development of the child. The developing child benefits from the emotional investment by their family, the absence of which can have long-term effects.

While warmth occupies one end of parenting dimension spectrum, 'rejection' lies at the other end, referring to an absence of the behaviors that represent acceptance. This is replaced by harmful behavior expressed on the part of the parent. There are four major behaviors documented: (a) Being cold and unaffectionate, (b) Hostile and aggressive, (c) Indifferent and neglecting or (d) Undifferentiated rejecting. All of these behavior allude to uncaring behavior on the part of the parents[19]. Rejection particularly denotes low warmth on the part of the parent towards their child. Internalizing behavioral problems such as anxiety[6] and depression[27] among children have been associated to parental rejection[6]. Spilt *et al.*[28], stated that higher perceptions of maternal warmth was related to lower rates of both externalizing and internalizing behaviors, emphasizing that positive perceptions portended to better behavioral outcomes. The presence of psychological morbidity such as anxiety or depression in the parent also bears an influence on the demonstration of hostility or neglect towards the growing child which may predict behavioral problems in adolescents[29].

Parental psychological and behavioral control: As adolescence sets in, an important phase of the maturing adolescent emerges where autonomy begins to be expressed. With increasing need to express autonomy and seek newer experiences, parental control may seem at odds with their needs[30]. Parental control may be either psychological or behavioral in nature. Psychological control involves minimizing the autonomy of the child while placing restrictions and manipulating behavior on the part of the parent. Behavioral control implies extreme management of the adolescent[27] which may lead to dependence on the parent. In cultures where authoritarian parenting is more then norm, the need in their child to express autonomy may leave parents with a sense of losing control over their adolescents[23].

Stattin and Kerr[31] described parental monitoring in terms of parent-initiated processes termed 'control,' and 'solicitation. ''Control' refers to parents' use of rules to check adolescent behaviors and 'solicitation,' which refers parents acquiring information on the whereabouts of their adolescent children both of which involve monitoring. Conversely, 'disclosure' is the process that involves the adolescent's inclination to openly discuss their behaviors with parents. The perception of the adolescent regarding parental authority plays a key role in determining if the child discloses regarding their behaviors.

Social domain theory is foundational for the concept of 'legitimacy' which applies to beliefs that adolescents have regarding parents setting rules and restrictions. Kuhn and Laird[32] further elaborated on adolescent perceptions of the legitimacy of parental authority. Adolescents as individuals differ in their perceptions on whether parents have the legitimate authority to enforce such limits. The widest differences in legitimacy beliefs are seen in early adolescence[30]. Research evidence points to strong legitimacy beliefs as being protective towards adolescents, i.e., those adolescents, who comply with parental monitoring and inform parents on their behaviors, were found to indulge less in risk taking. The opposite is true of those with weak legitimacy beliefs, who indulge in undesirable behaviors[33]. Such adolescents tend not to divulge regarding their misbehaviors. Even among those, who have weak legitimacy beliefs, perception of parental solicitation, i.e., whether parents actively seek information on their whereabouts, proved to be protective against risky behavior among adolescents[30]. Early initiation of parental monitoring activities with reciprocity on the part of the adolescents in sharing information were also seen to have better long term payoffs[34]. Parental monitoring is known to reduce as the adolescent grows older[35].

Evidence shows that lower levels of parental involvement and monitoring along with lower adolescent disclosure predicted increase in risk for problem behaviors[35,36]. These behaviors may include experimenting with substances[37], sexual experimentation[38] as well as externalizing[39] and internalizing behaviors among adolescents in varied settings. Certain family factors were seen to be associated with poor monitoring practices such as poor quality of family environment[40], having employed parents, being raised by a single-parent and having few or no religious beliefs[38]. Peer pressure and media exposure[40] combined with lower levels of knowledge on risk behaviors such as substance abuse[41], myths related to sexually transmitted diseases and reduced knowledge of care services[40] could also lead to poor

outcomes[40-44]. It has been documented that symptoms of internalizing and externalizing behavior can appear in early adolescence. However, communal perceptions of stigma in relation to mental health issues may preclude adolescents from seeking care from the right sources[45]. Excessive parental involvement and psychological control, along with attachment problems were also found to be related to undesirable behavioral outcomes in adolescents[41]. Excessive control with criticism and verbal punishment have also been documented to reduce self-reliance and also lead to anxiety disorders among adolescents[6,24]. However, parental monitoring has emerged as an effective method in checking adolescent delinquency[31].

Higher monitoring efforts on the part of the parents and adolescent perception of being monitored were seen to correlate with better outcomes[46,47]. On scrutiny of multiple parenting dimensions, Wang *et al.*[37], found that greater parental monitoring significantly impacted reduction in uptake of substance use while youth disclosure emerged as a significant factor in reducing delinquent behaviors among adolescents. Another important facet of parent-adolescent roles is the mutual trust based on open channels of communication. Adolescents, who perceived that they had a bond of mutual trust with their parents, participated less in risk-taking behaviors[35]. Parental substance abuse coupled with poor monitoring practices, was seen to be associated with higher levels of risk-taking in their adolescent children as well. Internalizing behaviors such as anxiety and depression were also observed. In high-risk settings, such as in a study conducted by Okigbo *et al.*[48], in the slums of Nairobi, cross-gender communication, i.e., boys with mothers and girls with fathers, predicted delay in risk of early sexual contact. Etheir KA *et al.*[34], in their study found that efforts taken by the parents to lay down rules involving time spent in the company of their peers and on romantic relationships along with the adolescents' perception that their parents were aware of their activities, significantly influenced whether adolescents had early sexual debut. Establishing open routes of communication between the parent-adolescent dyad has also been emphasized in other literature to influence reduction of sexual experimentation[34,35]. On the other hand, among adolescents with either authoritarian or permissive parents, higher rates of antisocial behavior was reported. In all, substantial influence on adolescent behaviors are attributed to parental monitoring, solicitation of information from peers and families of peers, mutual bonds of trust and youth disclosure.

It is widely acknowledged that influences in family systems are multi-directional. Although, evidence from varied settings indicate comparable outcomes, cultural undertones may have an influence on both parenting practices and adolescent perceptions. Bronstein MH, in his study described that parents follow "cultural scripts" in child rearing and pass these practices on to the next generations[49]. As parent-child relationships transition during adolescence, cultural differences need to be considered to obtain a well-rounded view of the processes involved. The emphasis in individualistic cultures may have greater orientation towards the development of individual autonomy while collectivistic cultures, more so in the East, may find emphasis on interdependence and may be more family oriented. However, in Asian cultures, the authoritarian style of parenting have been reported to be the norm with low parental warmth and dialogue with the child. Higher rejection and controlling behavior are also part of the parenting norm. However, behavioral and societal changes have been documented albeit at a slow pace. In studying parenting and attachment among parents in Germany and India, Albert *et al.*[50], noted that German parents placed importance on independence while Indian parents esteemed obedience higher. The concept of control among Indian adolescents was interpreted as protecting and caring behavior by the parent, while in a more individualistic culture, control could conflict with adolescent expectations of autonomy[50]. Mousavi *et al.*[51], examined the relationship between perceived parenting style and anxiety among Malay, Chinese, Indian, Arab and European/American adolescents. Their findings indicate that participants from the Asian population reported greater anxiety which were correlated with parental rejection and over protective or controlling behaviors. Among European/American adolescents, parental control emerged as a significant predictor of anxiety although they rated their parents as least controlling among other ethnicities.

Engaging in risky behaviors, especially in traditional settings could also be related to cultural taboos as is the case with discussing reproductive[40] as well as mental health issues with adolescents. The onus of the family in initiating such discussion cannot be emphasized enough. Cultural undertones are thus important in determining parenting dimensions as well as how these are perceived by adolescents. While this is an important area of study, literature on perceptions of adolescents on parental disciplining practices are few and far between in the eastern context.

CONCLUSION

The uniqueness of this review is that it explores parenting, adolescent perceptions and their behaviors in both Eastern

and Western contexts. Parental demonstration of warmth or rejection as well as monitoring and controlling behaviors has been delved into. The onus on providing positive experiences to nurture well-rounded psychological development in an individual rests with the immediate family. Adolescent perceptions of the family environment and parental practices, bonding during infancy as well as their beliefs on legitimacy of parental monitoring practices have been discussed. Behavioral problems that stem during adolescence may predict trajectories that extend into adulthood. Interestingly, cultural norms have emerged as important mediators of both parenting practices and adolescent behaviors. Dearth of literature on cultural influences of adolescent behaviors especially in the Eastern context warrant further exploration. A better understanding of cultural mediators may provide important insights in designing interventions to promote better outcomes among adolescents.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Understanding the role of parenting dimensions on influencing adolescent perceptions and their outcomes was the goal of this review. The study discovers that expression of parenting dimensions such as warmth and consistent monitoring were found to portend to better adolescent behaviors while rejecting and overly controlling behaviors on the part of the parent may lead to maladaptive behaviors. These findings were comparable in both Eastern and Western contexts. The present review uncovers the critical observation that both parenting practices and adolescent perceptions may be influenced by cultural norms which are not frequently explored by researchers. The importance of cultural factors as mediators in adolescent outcomes is an important area that needs further exploration due to paucity of studies in the Eastern context.

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