

The Relationship Between Authoritarian Parenting, Difficulty in Emotional Regulation and Social Anxiety in College Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: Authoritarian parenting style is of great interest as it can be related to explaining various deficits in one's emotional well-being and mental health. This makes it pertinent to study and examine the causes and relationships of authoritarian style of parenting leading to individuals not being able to regulate emotions appropriately and developing social anxiety. The intention of this research was to explore the alliance between Authoritarian Parenting, Difficulty in Emotional regulation as well as Social Anxiety in college students residing in the city of Mumbai.

Methodology: A correlational study was employed using the purposive sampling techniques. Participants were 147 college students within the ages of 18 to 23 years who completed an online survey assessing their Attitude and opinions of Authoritarian Parenting, Difficult in Emotional Regulation, Social Anxiety. The questionnaires used for assessing these variables were Perceived Parenting Style Scale, Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale (short form), Liebowitz social anxiety scale respectively.

Results: Significant positive associations were found between Authoritarian Parenting and Difficulty in Emotional Regulation ($r=0.55$, $p<.001$) and between Difficulty in Emotional Regulation and Social Anxiety ($r=0.28$, $p<.001$) whereas no relationship was found between Authoritarian parenting and Social Anxiety.

Conclusion: The regression model denotes that Authoritarian parenting significantly predicts Difficulty in Emotional Regulation. Limitations and implications for further future research on the relationship between these variables conducted are discussed.

Keywords: authoritarian parenting, emotional regulation, social anxiety, college students, anxiety.

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INTRODUCTION

Authoritarian parenting is defined as a parenting style that is very strict and demands immediate obedience and is perceived as parents having extreme control over their children. This type of parenting style depicts parents that show lack of warmth and are not reciprocative. Parents who depict authoritarian parenting style express their dominance and power over their offsprings through inflexible and rigid rules, threats, punishments, induction of guilt, withdrawal for love and coercion [1]. Emotional regulation is defined as an individual's ability to effectively regulate, manage and reciprocate to others' emotions and emotions situations as well as experiences [2]. Difficulty in emotion regulation is also known as dysregulation or emotional dysregulation and is defined as inability to manage and control one's emotions. This could lead to mood swings and irritability, aggression and frustrations and decrease in emotional health [3]. Social anxiety is a mental health disorder that is defined as a persistent, intense worry and anxiety of being appraised negatively or embarrassed in a social situation by other observers. They have a fear of speaking in public places and social situations [4].

Authoritarian parenting, characterized by high levels of control and low emotional warmth, has been consistently associated with adverse psychosocial outcomes in young adults. College students raised in authoritarian family environments often report greater emotional difficulties and heightened social anxiety compared to their peers from more supportive parenting backgrounds. Recent literature suggests that difficulties in emotional regulation may serve as a key mechanism linking authoritarian parenting to social anxiety [5-6]. Baumrind's parenting framework originally identified authoritarian parenting as a style emphasizing obedience, strict discipline, and limited autonomy. Individuals exposed to such parenting often experience reduced opportunities to express emotions openly, potentially impairing the development of adaptive emotion regulation skills. Studies have shown that perceived authoritarian parenting is associated with increased emotional suppression, poor emotional awareness, and difficulties managing negative affect during adolescence and emerging adulthood. These deficits may persist in the college years, a developmental period marked by increased social and academic demands [7].

Research examining emotional regulation as a mediator has provided important insights. Research has found that controlling and emotionally invalidating parenting practices were associated with greater emotional dysregulation and internalizing symptoms in youth [8]. Similarly, authors have proposed that parenting influences children's emotional competence through modeling, emotional climate, and emotion-related socialization practices [9]. Authoritarian parents, by discouraging emotional expression and emphasizing compliance, may inadvertently hinder the development of healthy regulatory strategies.

Social anxiety, defined as the persistent fear of negative evaluation in social situations, has also been linked to authoritarian parenting. Studies have demonstrated that overcontrolling and critical parenting behaviors contribute to vulnerability for social anxiety by reducing perceived self-efficacy and increasing fear of social judgment. In college populations, individuals reporting authoritarian parenting often exhibit higher levels of social avoidance, interpersonal sensitivity, and anxiety during social interactions [10].

Several studies have specifically explored the relationship among all three variables. Turliuc and Bujor reported that emotion regulation difficulties partially mediated the relationship between perceived authoritarian parenting and social anxiety symptoms among university students [11]. Likewise, Cheung and Park found that students who perceived their parents as highly controlling showed greater social anxiety, largely through increased emotional suppression and reduced emotional clarity. Similar findings have been reported across diverse cultural settings, suggesting that the pathway from authoritarian parenting to social anxiety through emotional dysregulation may be relatively robust [12].

The transition to college represents a critical period during which previously acquired emotional regulation patterns become highly relevant. Students with poor regulatory skills may struggle to manage anxiety-provoking social situations, thereby reinforcing avoidance behaviors and maintaining social anxiety symptoms. Emotional dysregulation appears to amplify the negative psychological effects of authoritarian parenting by limiting adaptive coping and increasing vulnerability to interpersonal stress [13-14]. Overall, literature supports a model in which authoritarian parenting contributes to difficulties in emotional regulation, which in turn increases the risk of social anxiety among college students. Understanding these relationships has important implications for preventive interventions targeting emotional regulation skills in young adults exposed to controlling and emotionally restrictive parenting environments.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of the current study was to study the association of Authoritarian parenting on emotional regulation and social anxiety in college students.

Objectives

- To study the association between authoritarian parenting and difficulty in emotion regulation in college students.
- To study the association between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety in college students.
- To study the association between difficulty in emotion regulation and social anxiety in college students.

Hypotheses

- There will be a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting and difficulty in emotion regulation in college students.
- There will be a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety in college students.
- There will be a positive correlation between difficulty in emotion regulation and social anxiety in college students
- Ancillary Hypothesis – Authoritarian parenting will predict Difficulty in Emotional Regulation among College Students

Operational Definitions of Variables

Authoritarian Parenting

Authoritarian style of parenting is a style of parenting in which parents set rigid rules for children and expect their children to obey them without question or may have to face severe punishment if their children don't obey them [1]. It will be measured by the subscale of Authoritarian style of parenting of the Perceived Parenting Scale.

Difficult Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation the ability to effectively modulate, regulate and manage as well as respond to emotions of others or emotional experiences [2]. Difficulty in emotional regulation is the difficulty of inability to regulate and manage as well as reciprocate or respond to emotional or emotional experiences. This is going to be measured by difficulty in emotion regulation scale (DERS).

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is a persistent and intense fear of being in social situation and being negatively evaluated by others [4]. It will be measured by the Liebowitz social anxiety scale.

Participants

There were 147 participants in the current research study. All participants were college students. Out of which students of age 18 were 11.1% of age 19 were 9.2% of age 20 were 9.0% of age 21 were 13.6% of age 22 were 34.8% and of age 23 were 22.3% of age. (M=21.05, SD=1.68). The females constitute 93% (n = 138) and males constitute 6.1% (n = 9) of the sample respectively.

Inclusion Criteria

- English Proficiency (at least 10th grade)
- Should be able to read and write.
- Individuals between the ages of 18-23 years.
- Currently residing in Mumbai.
- Living with both parents.

Exclusion Criteria

- No diagnosed mental health condition
- no disability, not working and no children with divorced and single parents.

Research Design

This research study made use of a correlational design using the survey method for data collection.

Sampling Method

Purposive Sampling and Convenience Sampling methods were employed in the study.

Tools Used

Perceived Parenting Style Scale

Divya and Manikanand [15] developed the perceived parenting style scale to evaluate and assess how children and individuals perceive the style of parenting that are used by their parents across the three categories of parenting style such as authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. It has 30 items in total with a Likert scale of five points for answering. The scale has five possible answers: strongly agree, agree, no comments, strongly disagree, disagree. The reliability found by computing a Cronbach Alpha of the authoritative style of parenting subscale was 0.79, authoritarian style of parenting was 0.81 and permissive style of parenting was 0.86. The overall reliability is the appropriate level of reliability. The authors propose it has face validity as well [16].

Difficulty in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS) short form

The Difficulty in Emotional Regulation scale short form was developed by Gratz and Roemer in 2004 [17]. The short form version was developed [18] to measure emotional dysregulation, and it consists of 18 items. Non-Acceptance of emotional responses, Difficulty engaging in goal-directed behaviour, Impulse control difficulties, Lack of emotional awareness, Limited access to emotion regulation strategies, Lack of emotional clarity are the six subscales that are assessed. It consists of Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost always), 2 (Most of the time), 3 (About half the time), 4 (Sometimes) to 5 (Almost never). It has good test-retest reliability, high internal consistency and predictive validity across studies [19].

Leibowitz Social Anxiety Scale

Liebowitz social anxiety scale used to assess the role of social anxiety in individuals' lives in various circumstances [20] It consists of 24 items which are self-rated by individuals. It evaluates not only the fear associated with certain situations but also avoidance of the situations. The test takers are asked to rate the situations with ratings including none, mild, moderate, severe for fear and ratings such as never, occasionally, often, usually for the avoidance subscale. The ratings are done with points ranging on a scale from 0-3. It has strong test-retest reliability is 0.83 and internal consistency is 0.95 [21].

Procedure

The sampling method used to collect data in this research investigation was purposive sampling. It was carried out among college adults within the age range of 18-23 years. The data was collected by circulating the scales to the target population. The sample size was 147 college students. The participants of this research study were told about research being conducted in a brief manner and their consent was asked from them. Once the participants consented to voluntarily participate in the study, they were requested to provide their demographic details followed by four scales. After answering the form, the participants were debriefed about the importance of the study and the variables and thanked for their participation. There was no financial compensation given to the participants for their participation however individual reports containing their scores and results were furnished on demand.

Statistical Analysis

With the help of Google Sheet Excel and JASP software version 0.19.3.0, the statistical analysis was calculated. For all four variables, gender, course and year of study, descriptive statistics were also calculated. Pearson's product moment correlation for all four variables was also done to obtain the inferential statistics for all the four variables. Simple linear regression was calculated as an ancillary analysis to predict whether authoritarian parenting predicts emotional dysregulation.

RESULTS

In table 1, it is depicted that the mean of Authoritarian Parenting (AP) was observed to be 25.78, for Difficulty in emotional regulation (DERS) the mean was observed to be 53.65 and Social Anxiety (SA) was observed to be 222.88. The standard deviation values for AP, DER, SA- fear were observed to be 8.82, 12.44, 62.35. The range obtained for Authoritarian Parenting was 40 (maximum value being 50 and minimum being 10), for Difficulty in Emotional Regulation was 61 (maximum value being 90 and minimum being 29), and for social anxiety was found to be 373 (maximum value being 436 and minimum being 66).

Variance, Skewness and Kurtosis were also computed to check for normality and homogeneity in the data. The values of variance for AP were 77.7, DERS Values of variance were observed to be 154.79 and for SA-fear it was observed to be 3888.05. The values found for AP were (Skewness being 0.26 and Kurtosis being -0.46 with Std. Error of Skewness being 0.2 and Std. Error of Kurtosis being 0.4). The values found for DERS were (Skewness being 0.22 and Kurtosis being -0.24 with Std. Error of Skewness being 0.2 and Std. Error of Kurtosis being 0.4) and for SA- fear the values were found to be (Skewness being 0.34 and Kurtosis being 1 with Std. Error of Skewness being 0.2 and Std. Error of Kurtosis being 0.4).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Authoritarian parenting, difficulty in emotional regulation scale and social anxiety

N=147	Age	AP	DERS	SA- fear
Mean	21.05 years	25.78	53.65	222.88
Std. Deviation	1.68	8.82	12.44	62.35
Variance	2.83	77.76	154.79	3888.05
Skewness	-0.62	0.26	0.22	0.34
Std. Error of Skewness	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Kurtosis	-0.92	-0.46	-0.24	1
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Range	5	40	61	373
Minimum	18	10	29	66
Maximum	23	50	90	439

Note: AP= Authoritarian Parenting, DERS = Difficulty in emotional regulation, SA- fear = Social anxiety.

Table 2: Pearson's product moment correlation between Authoritarian parenting, Difficulty in Emotional Regulation and Social Anxiety (N=181)

Variables	AP	DERS	SA-Fear
AP	—		
DERS	0.55***	—	
SA- fear	0.14	0.28***	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: AP= Authoritarian Parenting, DERS = Difficulty in emotional regulation, SA- fear = Social anxiety

Correlation trends between the variables studied are shown in table 2. A positive significant association was observed to be found between Authoritarian Parenting and Difficulty in Emotional Regulation ($r=0.55$, $p<.001$). Authoritarian parenting and Social Anxiety shared no significant relationship. A positive significant association was observed to be found between Difficulty in Emotional Regulation and Social Anxiety ($r=0.28$, $p<.001$). Therefore, the first hypothesis that there will be a significant positive association between Authoritarian parenting and Difficulty in Emotional Regulation among college students and the third hypothesis that there will be a significant positive association between difficulty in emotional regulation and social anxiety among college students were found to be validated. Whereas the second hypothesis that there will be a significant positive association between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety among college students was not validated.

Ancillary Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to see the variance in Difficulty in Emotional Regulation brought by Authoritarian Parenting. Table 3 represents the F - value which is 62.45 and is significant at $0.001 = 16.78$, $p<0.001$). This denotes that the regression model denotes that Authoritarian parenting sufficiently predicts Difficulty in Emotional Regulation (table 3).

Table 3: Regression table for Authoritarian Parenting and Difficulty in Emotional Regulation

Model		R	R2	Adjusted R2	RMSE
M ₀	Regression	0	0	0	12.44
M ₁	Regression	0.55	0.3	0.3	10.44

Note. Criterion: Authoritarian Parenting; Outcome: Difficulty in Emotional Regulation.

Table 4: Regression table for Authoritarian Parenting predicting Difficulty in Emotional Regulation

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p
M ₁	Regression	6803.01	1	6803.01	62.45	< .001
	Residual	15796.29	145	108.94		
	Total	22599.31	146			

Note. Outcome: Difficulty in Emotional Regulation.; Predictor: Authoritarian Parenting

Regression analysis was conducted to see the variance in Difficulty in Emotional Regulation brought by Authoritarian Parenting. The table represents the F - value which is 62.45 and is significant at 0.001 = 16.78, p<0.001). This denotes that the regression model denotes that Authoritarian parenting sufficiently predicts Difficulty in Emotional Regulation (Table 4).

Table 5: Beta value for Authoritarian parenting

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized Beta	F	p
M ₀	(Intercept)	53.65	1.03		52.29	< .001
M ₁	(Intercept)	33.7	2.67		12.63	< .001
	AP	0.77	0.1	0.55	7.9	< .001

Table 5 represents standardized beta (β) value of predictor variable (Authoritarian Parenting). As it can be seen the standardized beta value of Authoritarian Parenting was observed to be 0.55 at 0.001 level of significance.

As per the results there was a positive significant association that was observed to be between Authoritarian parenting and Difficulty in Emotional Regulation. The same pattern of association was also observed to be found between Difficulty in Emotional Regulation and Social Anxiety, and a positive significant correlation was found between Difficulty in Emotional Regulation and Social Anxiety whereas no significant association was found between Authoritarian parenting and social anxiety. Thus, the first hypothesis and third hypothesis was accepted whereas the second hypothesis was not validated. The regression model denotes that Authoritarian parenting sufficiently predicts Difficulty in Emotional Regulation.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between authoritarian parenting, difficulties in emotional regulation, and social anxiety among college students in Mumbai. The findings partially supported the proposed hypotheses. A significant positive relationship was observed between authoritarian parenting and difficulty in emotional regulation, while a significant positive association was also found between difficulty in emotional regulation and social anxiety. However, contrary to expectations, no significant relationship was observed between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety. Furthermore,

regression analysis demonstrated that authoritarian parenting significantly predicted emotional dysregulation, accounting for approximately 30% of the variance in difficulty in emotional regulation.

The strongest finding of the present study was the significant positive correlation between authoritarian parenting and emotional dysregulation. This finding is consistent with Baumrind's theory, which characterizes authoritarian parents as highly controlling, punitive, and emotionally restrictive while offering limited warmth and responsiveness [7]. Such parenting environments may inhibit children's opportunities to develop adaptive emotional awareness and expression. Previous research has similarly demonstrated that controlling and emotionally invalidating parenting practices are associated with poorer emotional competence and greater difficulties in emotion regulation during adolescence and young adulthood. Studies have proposed [8] that parenting practices influence emotional development through emotional modeling, family emotional climate, and emotion-related socialization processes, all of which may be adversely affected in authoritarian households. The significant predictive value of authoritarian parenting in the present study further supports the notion that early family experiences contribute substantially to later emotional functioning [9].

The study also found a significant positive relationship between emotional dysregulation and social anxiety. This finding is in line with contemporary cognitive-behavioral models of social anxiety, which emphasize the role of ineffective emotional management in maintaining anxiety symptoms. Individuals who experience difficulties understanding, accepting, and regulating their emotions may perceive social situations as more threatening and may engage in avoidance behaviors to reduce distress [22]. Previous studies have consistently reported that deficits in emotional regulation are associated with higher levels of social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and interpersonal discomfort among college students [10, 23]. The current findings therefore reinforce the importance of emotional regulation as a protective factor against the development and maintenance of social anxiety symptoms.

Interestingly, no significant association was found between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety. This finding differs from several previous studies that reported positive relationships between parental overcontrol, criticism, and social anxiety among adolescents and young adults [11-13]. One possible explanation is that the relationship between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety may not be direct but rather mediated through emotional regulation processes. In other words, authoritarian parenting may contribute to emotional dysregulation, which subsequently increases vulnerability to social anxiety. This explanation is supported by the findings of Turluc and Bujor, who reported that emotion regulation difficulties partially mediated the relationship between perceived authoritarian parenting and social anxiety symptoms among university students [11]. The absence of a direct relationship in the present study may therefore reflect the operation of indirect pathways.

Cultural factors may also contribute to the observed findings. In collectivistic societies such as India, certain authoritarian parenting practices may be interpreted differently than in Western contexts. Behavior perceived as controlling may sometimes be viewed as expressions of parental concern, involvement, or protection rather than rejection. Consequently, such parenting practices may not necessarily result in heightened social anxiety despite their negative impact on emotional development. Furthermore, the predominantly female sample and the restricted age range of participants may have influenced the strength of observed associations.

Implications

The findings have important practical implications. Educational institutions and mental health professionals working with college students should focus on strengthening emotional regulation skills through preventive and therapeutic interventions. Programs incorporating emotional awareness training, mindfulness-based approaches, cognitive restructuring, and adaptive coping strategies may help reduce the adverse psychological consequences associated with authoritarian parenting experiences. Parent education programs emphasizing emotional validation, autonomy support, and constructive communication may also contribute to healthier emotional development among adolescents and young adults.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, and the use of self-report measures may introduce social desirability and recall biases. The study relied on a purposive sample from Mumbai, limiting generalizability to broader populations. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, include more diverse samples, and examine potential mediating and moderating variables such as self-esteem, attachment style, resilience, and perceived social support.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study highlights the significant role of authoritarian parenting in shaping emotional regulation difficulties and demonstrates the association between emotional dysregulation and social anxiety among college students. While authoritarian parenting was not directly associated with social anxiety, the findings suggest that emotional regulation may represent an important pathway through which parenting experiences influence psychological adjustment. These results underscore the importance of fostering emotionally supportive family environments and promoting emotional regulation skills to enhance mental health outcomes among young adults.

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