

A Cross-Cultural Review of Parenting Styles: Examining the Universality and Cultural Specificity of Authoritative and Authoritarian Approaches

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Abstract: With the accelerating process of globalization, the variations in parenting styles across different cultural contexts have increasingly drawn attention. These differences have profound implications not only for children's psychological development but also for their academic performance and overall well-being. This study examines the expressions and impacts of authoritative and authoritarian parenting in diverse cultural settings, aiming to explore how cultural factors influence the outcomes of these parenting styles. Through an extensive review of existing literature, this research compares parenting models across Western, East Asian, and Middle Eastern cultures, highlighting both the universality and the cultural specificity of parenting practices. The findings suggest that cultural context plays a critical moderating role in determining the outcomes of various parenting styles. While certain parenting styles exhibit common traits across cultures, the effects of these styles are significantly shaped by cultural norms and values, thus revealing the intricate ways in which cultural context mediates the efficacy of parenting approaches.

Keywords: Authoritative Parenting, Authoritarian Parenting, Cross-Cultural Research, Mental Health, Academic Achievement

1. Introduction

Parenting styles are a critical topic in understanding children's psychological development and behavioral patterns, with cultural contexts significantly influencing their manifestations and effects. For instance, authoritative parenting is regarded as the ideal model in Western cultures, while authoritarian parenting is also associated with academic achievement in East Asian cultures [1]. Recent studies indicate that authoritative parenting generally enhances adolescents' life satisfaction, whereas the absence of this style may lead to a notable decrease in well-being.

Authoritative parenting emphasizes a balance between establishing behavioral norms and providing emotional support, fostering both independence and decision-making abilities. In contrast, authoritarian parenting is characterized by high levels of control, with limited emotional support and restricted development of autonomy.

Existing research often focuses on single cultural contexts, overlooking the moderating effects of culture on the outcomes of parenting styles. This study aims to uncover cross-cultural differences in parenting practices and explore the profound influence of cultural factors on family education.

This review systematically examines the cross-cultural manifestations of authoritative and authoritarian parenting, focusing on the following aspects:

A. Whether the core characteristics of authoritative parenting remain consistent across different cultural contexts and how its role in promoting mental health and social adaptation is influenced by cultural moderation.

B. The cultural differences in the short-term behavioral regulation and long-term psychological effects of authoritarian parenting.

C. Whether existing research has overlooked the impact of cultural dynamics and non-traditional family structures on parenting styles.

By addressing these issues, this review aims to provide new directions for future research and deepen the understanding of the cross-cultural diversity of parenting styles.

2. Cross-Cultural Manifestations of Authoritative Parenting

2.1. In Western Cultures

In Western cultures, authoritative parenting is characterized by a combination of high control and high support, integrating behavioral regulation with respect for independence. It is widely regarded as a positive approach [2]. Baumrind's research highlights that this parenting style not only reduces family conflict through rule explanation and emotional support but also significantly enhances adolescents' self-confidence and sense of responsibility. Studies have further shown that in families with favorable economic conditions, authoritative parenting greatly improves adolescents' life satisfaction, reflecting its psychological support functions [3].

Moreover, the influence of authoritative parenting is evident even within hybrid parenting models. Through cluster analysis, Lavrič et al. found that in parenting styles combining permissive and authoritative elements, core characteristics such as democratic communication and rational explanation of rules effectively alleviated adolescents' psychological stress while enhancing their adaptability [3]. These findings suggest that, even in diverse cultural contexts, the core mechanisms of authoritative parenting demonstrate strong adaptability and universality.

2.2. In East Asian Cultures

East Asian cultures, characterized by collectivism and a strong emphasis on familial responsibility, significantly influence the implementation of authoritative parenting. The differences in socioeconomic development and educational philosophies across South Korea, Japan, and China provide diverse perspectives for exploring authoritative parenting [3-4].

In South Korea, authoritative parenting balances emotional support with rule-setting, emphasizing parental involvement and clear expectations. Research has shown that this approach significantly reduces depressive symptoms in adolescents and fosters a growth mindset, highlighting the positive impact of combining high support and high demands on mental health and cognitive development [4].

Japanese family culture places importance on rules and collaboration. Authoritative parenting in Japan is marked by open communication between parents and children, which strengthens adolescents' psychological resilience and social adaptability [3]. Compared to South Korea, Japan places greater emphasis on social responsibility, with its effects reflected in enhanced self-esteem and academic achievement among children [3].

In China, authoritative parenting achieves a balance between academic and social development through clear rules and emotional support [5]. This approach fosters the cultivation of a growth mindset while pursuing both academic success and a sense of social responsibility [4-5].

2.3. In Middle Eastern Cultures

Authoritative parenting in Middle Eastern cultures is deeply influenced by religious and familial values, reflecting notable diversity within the interplay of modernization and tradition. In more modernized countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, authoritative parenting fosters adolescents' mental health and academic achievement by combining clear rules with emotional support [6-7]. Democratic communication and shared decision-making within families serve as key mechanisms for building trust between parents and children, helping adolescents maintain psychological resilience in rapidly changing societies [1].

In contrast, in more traditional societies such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen, authoritative parenting emphasizes transmitting cultural values through rules while maintaining strong familial bonds through emotional support [1,7]. This approach reflects the flexibility and adaptability of Middle Eastern families in balancing traditional and modern educational demands. However, research suggests that with the continued effects of globalization and urbanization, this parenting style is undergoing a transformation. Some families are increasingly adopting open communication, which further enhances the positive impacts of authoritative parenting [2,7].

3. Cross-Cultural Manifestations of Authoritarian Parenting

3.1. In Western Cultures

In Western cultures, authoritarian parenting, characterized by high control and insufficient emotional support, is often associated with significant negative outcomes. Research indicates that this parenting style, relying heavily on strict punishment and behavioral control, frequently leads to feelings of dissatisfaction, social withdrawal, and diminished psychological well-being and social adaptability among adolescents [2,8]. In individualistic societies, where autonomy and emotional needs are highly valued, the adverse effects of authoritarian parenting are particularly pronounced [3].

However, in immigrant families, elements of authoritarian parenting may persist due to cultural continuity. These families often incorporate aspects of authoritative parenting, such as greater flexibility in rule-setting and a stronger focus on emotional communication, to mitigate the negative impacts [3,6]. Nevertheless, existing research is insufficient to draw definitive conclusions about the long-term effects of such hybrid parenting models on adolescents' mental health [9].

3.2. In East Asian Cultures

The emphasis on discipline and academic success in East Asian cultures lends authoritarian parenting notable cultural adaptability in countries such as China, South Korea, and Japan. In China, this parenting style helps children achieve academic advantages through strict rules and high expectations [5]. This reliance on discipline is particularly evident in families with multiple children, reflecting not only the pursuit of academic excellence but also the importance placed on family social status. However, this approach may hinder the development of children's autonomy and contribute to elevated psychological stress [9]. In South Korea, authoritarian parenting is closely linked to the societal focus on university entrance exams. While it yields significant short-term improvements in academic performance, it also correlates with higher rates of anxiety and depressive symptoms among adolescents [4]. In Japan, authoritarian parenting emphasizes strict discipline to enhance academic outcomes, but it mitigates psychological stress by incorporating elements of authoritative parenting

[3-4]. These phenomena suggest that authoritarian parenting demonstrates significant short-term effectiveness in East Asian cultures, but its long-term impact depends on specific cultural and familial moderating factors.

3.3. In Middle Eastern Cultures

Authoritarian parenting in traditional Middle Eastern societies is deeply influenced by collectivism and hierarchical structures, characterized by high levels of control and strict obedience. In countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen, families rely on discipline and authority to maintain order. While this approach effectively regulates children's behavior in the short term, it may have long-term adverse effects on psychological well-being and the development of autonomy [7].

In more modernized nations such as Lebanon and Jordan, authoritarian parenting exhibits dynamic adaptability. Families are increasingly integrating features of authoritative parenting, such as emotional support and flexible discipline, to better meet the demands of modern society while alleviating psychological stress in children [1]. This shift reflects the moderating role of socioeconomic factors in shaping parenting styles.

Additionally, collectivist cultural values imbue authoritarian parenting with a sense of care and familial responsibility. In the Middle East, strict discipline is not merely a method of control but is also perceived as a means of protecting children and preserving cultural values. However, with the accelerating pace of globalization, some families are beginning to adopt more open elements in their parenting approach, striving to strike a balance between tradition and modernity [1].

4. Cross-Cultural Comparisons of Authoritative and Authoritarian Parenting

4.1. Universality

Across different cultural contexts, authoritative and authoritarian parenting share certain consistencies in emphasizing behavioral regulation. Authoritative parenting combines control with support, significantly promoting children's mental health and social adaptation [2,7]. Meanwhile, authoritarian parenting, characterized by high levels of control, effectively enhances behavior management and academic performance in the short term, particularly in cultures that place a strong emphasis on discipline [3,6]. For instance, in Middle Eastern cultures, the combination of rules and emotional support in authoritarian parenting fosters family cohesion [1,7]. Despite variations in form, these features suggest that the core values of parenting styles exhibit a degree of universality across cultures.

4.2. Differences

Differences in cultural values and parenting goals shape how parenting styles are expressed in various cultural contexts. In Western cultures, authoritative parenting emphasizes open communication and independence, significantly improving children's mental health [3,10]. In East Asian cultures, greater emphasis is placed on academic success, where authoritarian parenting achieves academic advantages through strict rules but simultaneously increases psychological stress [4-5]. In Middle Eastern cultures, authoritarian parenting often combines familial care with strict discipline, fulfilling functions of protection and cultural transmission [1,7]. These differences reflect the role of culture in balancing behavioral regulation and emotional support, revealing the deep cultural embedding of parental decision-making.

4.3. Limitations

Current research on cross-cultural parenting styles has notable limitations. Firstly, studies on authoritative parenting predominantly focus on its positive effects, often overlooking its applicability in resource-constrained regions or during periods of cultural transition. For instance, economic constraints may hinder its implementation in Southeast Asia or Africa [1,5]. Secondly, research on authoritarian parenting largely emphasizes its negative impacts, without sufficiently addressing its potential short-term advantages in competitive educational settings [3-4].

Moreover, the dynamic effects of globalization and digitalization on parenting styles, such as how online interactions reshape traditional practices, remain underexplored [9]. Future research should place greater emphasis on the evolution of parenting styles within immigrant families and multicultural contexts, investigating how cultural dynamics influence family education practices over time.

5. Discussion

Authoritative parenting demonstrates high adaptability across different cultural contexts due to its balance between rules and emotional support [2-3]. Whether fostering independence among Western adolescents or enhancing academic performance and psychological resilience in East Asian children, this approach exhibits strong universality. In contrast, the effects of authoritarian parenting are more influenced by cultural context: in East Asian cultures, it effectively improves academic outcomes but may exacerbate psychological stress, while in Western societies, its high-control characteristics are often associated with psychological conflict and lower life satisfaction [4,9]. These differences underscore the moderating role of culture in shaping the outcomes of parenting styles.

6. Conclusion

This study explores the commonalities and differences between authoritative and authoritarian parenting from a cross-cultural perspective. Authoritative parenting demonstrates remarkable adaptability across various cultural contexts. In Western cultures, it combines rules and support, emphasizing democratic communication to significantly enhance adolescents' mental health and life satisfaction. In East Asian cultures, collectivist values are integrated, balancing emotional support with academic expectations to improve psychological resilience and academic performance. In Middle Eastern cultures, religious and familial values imbue authoritative parenting with unique significance, using rule-setting and emotional support to strengthen family cohesion while showing flexibility in response to modernization.

In contrast, the impact of authoritarian parenting varies substantially across cultural contexts. In Western societies, its characteristics of high control and low support are often associated with psychological conflict and social isolation, particularly in individualistic environments that prioritize autonomy. In East Asian cultures, authoritarian parenting is recognized for its role in fostering academic success but is also linked to increased psychological stress. Over time, parenting practices in East Asia have gradually integrated elements of authoritative parenting, mitigating some of the adverse effects and promoting a more balanced approach. In Middle Eastern cultures, authoritarian parenting is frequently viewed as a manifestation of familial care and responsibility. However, as modernization and globalization progress, an increasing number of families are shifting towards a parenting style that balances strict discipline with emotional support, illustrating the dynamic evolution of parenting practices.

In conclusion, cultural context plays a critical moderating role in determining the outcomes of various parenting styles. This review, however, is limited by its reliance on findings predominantly derived from Western and East Asian cultures, potentially neglecting the diversity and nuances

present in smaller cultural groups. Additionally, the evolving nature of parenting practices in the era of globalization, particularly the influence of technological advancements on family dynamics, remains an area requiring further exploration. Future research should prioritize examining how digital environments and societal transformations influence parenting approaches, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity and progression of family education within different cultural settings. Such insights will be instrumental in informing and refining educational policies and intervention strategies.

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