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Parenting and Adolescence: An Analysis of the Various Dimensions of Parental Influence on Adolescents

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ABSTRACT:

Development is the progressive and coherent changes taking place in individuals across the lifespan. One of the crucial periods of development is adolescence, popularly known as the 'period of storm and stress'. The parenting behavior and styles adopted by parents and their interaction with the adolescents tend to have a varied outcome on the adolescents, their mental health, self-esteem, internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors, sexual orientation, and safe sex practices, educational performance, peer relationships, and the extent of cohesion and/or conflict in the parent-adolescent bond. Gender differences in terms of the effect of exposure to a dysfunctional family environment, parental treatment or monitoring, and resolution of conflicts are visible in adolescents and/or parents.

With the onset of the pandemic in the early months of 2020, the globe adapted to the 'new normal' lifestyle practices. With the parents and the adolescents perpetually under the same roof and a lack of other sources of social interaction, changes were observed in the parent-adolescent dynamics in terms of spending quality time together, mental health issues, and its relation to academic performance.

This paper analyses the different dimensions of parental influence on adolescence throughout the pre-and post-pandemic period.

KEYWORDS: Parenting, Parental Styles, Family, Adolescence, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION:

Development is the complex and progressive orderly series of qualitative and quantitative coherent changes that take place in an individual from conception to death. Research on Development is a relatively recent endeavor. It did not begin until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through ideas about how children grow and change have existed over centuries. This speculation when combined with research originates in the field of Developmental Science. Thus, **Developmental science** is a field of study, devoted to the understanding of constancy and change throughout the lifespan¹. Broadly, there are 8 stages of development among which the 5th one is **Adolescence (12-19 years)**, the transition between childhood and adulthood².

The purpose of **adolescence** is for a child to attain physical as well as sexual maturity and become capable of reproduction and transform psychosocially into young adults, breaking from their childhood attachment and security to acquire autonomy and a sense of identity.

Parenting involves raising children and providing them with protection and nurturance in order to ensure their healthy development into adulthood. A **parenting style** is a psychological construct representing unique combinations of behavioral strategies used by parents over a wide range of situations, creating an enduring child-rearing climate. The U.S. government published its first document on parenting in 1914. In the 1930s, universities offered parenting courses and **Arnold Gesell** and **Erik Erickson** offered theories of parenting and child development. Researchers in the 1930s to 1960s, employing a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, used various factor analytic methods to identify the major dimensions underlying observer ratings of general parenting characteristics. In the typical study, trained observers conduct interviews or observe parents and rate parents on general trait terms using Likert scales. Factor analyses of the data from these primarily European American, middle-class samples typically identified two dimensions of parent behavior: (i) parental acceptance, warmth, or support (ii) parental control. These two factors were usually found in studies employing global observer ratings, parent reports, or child reports of parenting behavior. During the 1960s, **Earl Schaefer** and **Wesley Becker** proposed the **circumplex models of parenting** with 2 dimensions: affective attitude towards and exertion of control over the child. **Diana Baumrind** (1971), with later revision from **Maccoby and Martin** (1983) established 4 parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and indulgent based on parental demandingness from and responsiveness to the child^{3,4}. In the 1980s, **Bronfenbrenner** proposed his theory of development, and families were seen to maintain a balance between home and work. The government supported families through tax credits and

subsidies for child care. In present times, parents are presented with more information than ever before. Books cover a wide range of topics around child-rearing. A rich assortment of magazines and the Internet offer instant information that is continually updated.

The strong emotional parent-child bond witnesses a change in dynamics as the child transitions into the stage of adolescence wherein they de-idealize their parents and establish a sound psychological distance between them. Adolescents have a high need for emotional and behavioral autonomy⁵ which is considered age-inappropriate by their parents, leading to frequent conflicts and reduced cohesion¹. A healthy parent-child relationship prior to adolescence ensures a smooth transition to an egalitarian parent-adolescent relationship with minor difficulties and optimum relational quality whereas a problematic parent-child relationship prior to adolescence leads to reduced well-being and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems¹.

With the wrath of the pandemic in the early months of 2020, people had to adjust to the 'new normal'. Adolescents were restricted to their homes and to interact with family members only. The limited peer interaction because of the closure of schools and restrictions on outdoor activities led to detrimental consequences in adolescents- boredom and gadget addiction². Decreased parental warmth, increased parental control, and increased parent-adolescent conflicts were observed³ due to continuous interaction between them within the four walls.

Objective: This present paper aims to analyse the relationship between parenting and its outcomes in adolescents by analysing the influence of parents on the different dimensions of adolescents and their lives throughout the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic time periods.

REVIEW OF DOMAINS:

Parenting Styles

Despite peer influence, parental influence is strong and affects the cognitive, social and emotional functioning of adolescents⁴. Usually, parents' perception of adolescents' storms and stress is dependent on parental responsiveness to them⁵. Parenting styles or behaviors, hence, are important determinants of adolescent outcomes. Adolescent's perception of parental behaviors, parental expectations, and parent-adolescent communication⁶ and parental support, behavioral control, and psychological control⁷ are the important factors that tend to vary across the 4 parenting styles illustrated by Baumrind (1981) and Maccoby-Martin (1973). In stark contrast with authoritarian parenting, an authoritative parenting style is associated with adolescents' self-esteem and well-being⁸ and positive outcomes with adolescents'

externalizing problems ⁹. Also, while parent-adolescent cohesion gradually decreased ¹⁰, parent-adolescent conflict intensity gradually increased from authoritative and indulgent parents to authoritarian and neglectful parents ¹¹ with parent-adolescent conflict frequency unrelated to parenting style ¹⁰. It is found that parental warmth produces a positive impact on adolescents as opposed to parental strictness whereas maternal psychological control predicts poor adolescent academic performance or prosocial behaviors ¹². While ¹⁰ consider indulgent followed by authoritative parenting styles as producing the best outcomes in contrast to neglectful or authoritarian parenting, ⁷ argues that the congruent positive authoritative style yields the most favorable outcomes in adolescents as opposed to the congruent authoritarian parenting style. It is seen that despite the general negative outcomes of authoritarian parenting styles as opposed to authoritative parenting styles, the former breeds fewer negative effects in ethnic minority groups ¹³ stressing on cultural differences in parenting practices. Also, rather than strictly adhering to a single parenting style, situation or culture-specific combinations of parental behaviors seem to suit parents more ¹⁴.

Family Dynamics

During early and middle adolescence, parent-adolescent conflicts increase owing to decreased cohesion and communication, both of which are restored during late adolescence ¹⁵ leading to a horizontal and conflict-free parent-adolescent relationship ¹⁶. Adolescent well-being is positively influenced by a high quality of the parent-adolescent relationship and negatively influenced by frequent conflicts ¹⁷. Inter-parental relationships may also affect adolescents. Parental relationship churning leads to more externalizing problems for the adolescents than parental union dissolution ¹⁸, victims of IPV are usually hostile and neglectful towards their adolescent kids ¹⁹ and unusual family structures may cause externalizing and internalizing problems in the adolescents ¹⁷. Parent-adolescent relationships also tend to influence aggressiveness or delinquency in adolescents ²⁰.

Whereas problem behavior in girls can be predictive of low quality of support, home-monitoring, and peer-group monitoring by parents, problem behavior in boys is predictive only of poor parental home-monitoring ²¹. Although gender differences are not seen in adolescents' decline in aggression and increase in violating behaviors, they exist in parental practices. Boys are treated with less warmth and more over reactivity compared to the girls which builds aggressiveness in them. Gender differences in parents while dealing with adolescents is also seen. Fathers usually engage in positive problem solving and withdrawal in conflict engagement than mothers during adolescence ¹⁶.

The pandemic also caused certain changes to the parent-adolescent relationship dynamics with adolescents spending a huge amount of time with their parents²². Significant increase in adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems were seen in families with depressed parents, lower educational and income levels, and high parental conflicts²³. Parental stress and expressive suppression also led to depression and internalizing symptoms in adolescents during the lockdown²⁴. Gender differences in interaction with parents were observed wherein with the mother, obedience and quality time while with the father, central were communication and performing activities together²².

Sexuality and Safe Sexual Practises

Adolescents' sex is related to their sexual orientation where females are likely to experience sexual orientation deviations than their male counterparts which are further influenced by negative parenting practices²⁵. Sexual minority adolescents are less likely to be victims of abuse or depression and have problematic parent-child relations than heterosexual counterparts²⁶. However, an association between homosexual attraction and alcohol abuse as adults was discovered in sexual minority women and not in sexual minority men²⁷.

Parental guidance serves prime importance in adolescent sex education which can be avoided by parents sometimes owing to the experience of anxiety and apprehension²⁸. Parent-adolescent communication, a non-judgemental attitude²⁹ and parental monitoring predict less favorable attitudes regarding sexual initiation in adolescents^{30,31,32,33} with a much stronger association in girls than in boys³⁴, less permissive attitudes towards engaging in sexual practices and greater awareness of its consequences, favorable attitudes towards safe sex intentions and behaviors³⁵. Communication openness is a negative predictor of adolescent sexual behavior and a positive predictor of negative attitudes about peer sexual behavior, whereas communication comfort is a negative predictor of adolescents' disagreement with peer sexual behavior³⁶. Adolescents' perception of parental control over their sexual activities and the degree of importance given to parental approval determines the extent to which they engage in sexually risky behaviors³⁷. Monitoring, discipline, and communication with parents of the opposite gender is determinant of the initiation of sexual behaviors in adolescents³⁸. However, restriction of unsupervised time for the adolescent predicted sexual onset in the adolescent³⁰.

A lack of parental support and guidance, parental communication, marital conflicts, and economic hardships predict indulgence in sexual experiences for both male and female adolescents, and a lack of emotional intimacy with the same-sex parent predicts risky adolescent sexual behaviors^{39,32}. For

adolescents in the migration-affected community, poverty, parental delinquency and a volatile environment add to the risk factors⁴⁰.

Academics

Authoritative parenting is associated with higher levels of parental concern and family cohesiveness and gender differences are observed for parental concern, family discussion and academic performance⁴¹. The development of academic self-efficacy is often affected due to the authoritative style of parenting⁴². Regarding self-esteem outcomes, indulgent parenting is associated with equal or even higher levels of self-esteem on the grounds of academics, professional life, and affective components of the person⁴³. A positive relationship is observed between democratic parenting style and academic success and intrinsic motivation. Authoritarian and overprotective parenting styles had the most significant impact on learning approach and learning avoidance orientations⁴⁴. An individual's bond with the peer group (attachment and aggression) has a direct impact on the academic self-efficacy of the individual⁴². From a cross-cultural perspective, parents have a strong impact on the basic life values and educational plans of an adolescent⁴⁵ and it is seen that socioeconomic status, father's level of education, and high care scores for fathers are associated with improved academic outcomes in adolescent students⁴⁶.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a decrease in students' academic motivation during the lockdown period was perceived by parents. Adolescents with lower levels of parental support reported lower academic motivation in the online system as compared to physical school days⁴⁷. From this, it can be understood how important the role of a secondary caregiver is for behavioral engagement and changes and also to reduce disruptive behaviors in adolescents⁴⁸.

Mental Health

It was seen that there was a relationship between parental behaviors and their emerging stress and health outcomes⁴⁹. The majority of parents recognized that genetic factors may increase the risk for the presence of adolescent mental health problems while only 5% of the parents endorsed neurochemical disturbances and use of psychoactive substances as being hazardous⁵⁰. While studying the subscale of anxiety, the social phobia score is the most elevated subscale of anxiety in adolescents of all ethnic groups. In eastern cultures, especially Malaysian and Chinese adolescents reported the highest level of total anxiety score, whereas, in western culture, European/American adolescents reported the lowest level of anxiety on all subscales and symptoms⁵¹. There was an association between fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety in adolescents and greater conformity to the parental guidelines. Higher scores were associated with being female and higher levels of parental education⁵². During the development of

self-esteem in adolescents, parents' knowledge was significantly positively related to parenting practice and authoritative parenting style, while adolescents with authoritarian parents were prone to suicidal risk behavior. As an intervention to this situation, counselling to parents based on the findings would be helpful to enhance self-esteem and prevent suicidal risk behavior in adolescent children⁵³.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents, but not adolescents, showed an increase of negative affect as compared to the pre-pandemic period. On average, self-confident parents could successfully activate many personal resources that seemed to prevent their children's emotional dysregulation⁵⁴. Parents and adolescents in the sample dealt well with the circumstances, but individuals and families differed however to what extent the pandemic influenced their affect and parenting behavior⁵⁵. Though a significant association between subjective anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic and pro-social behavior problems was observed after the school closures. Therefore, providing sufficient mental health information, and designing an optimal tele-education, teleconsultation, and virtual activity programs to accommodate adolescents' biopsychosocial needs can be helpful for the adolescents to cope with the situation⁵⁶.

Social Life

In the domain of social life, the focus is placed on the role of peer groups and relationships affecting adolescents and their behaviors. It is observed that the perceived lack of support from parents is not replaced or compensated by the support of peers by adolescents. Again, for some extreme populations, it is seen that the adolescents who perceive a lack of parental support also lack the opportunity to gain social support from their peers⁵⁷. A significant association is observed between parenting practices and adolescents' prosocial behaviors. The evaluation of specific parenting practices is a useful approach for understanding the role of parents in prosocial development, where the central role of parenting practices in predicting sympathy and the indirect relations between parenting practices and prosocial behaviors were significantly observed⁵⁸. In adolescents, parental psychological control acts as a precursor that contributes to children's peer victimization experiences, irrespective of their gender. Adolescent behavioral problems also may result in changes in parenting practices which may also exist for peer victimization⁵⁹.

Contrary to these findings, with respect to the mental health of the adolescent, poor parental relationships and depression were more significantly associated with suicidal ideations as compared to poor peer relationships⁶⁰. Parents' interaction with the adolescent is not a predictor of the quality of

friendship in adolescence. Only 2% of the quality of friendship was due to parent/child interaction, which did not indicate a strong relationship ⁶¹.

EVALUATION:

Parents play a crucial role in the life of adolescents and have a strong impact on their basic values and educational plans ⁴⁵. Authoritative parenting and parental warmth have been radically associated with the following outcomes- better self-esteem and well-being, positive results in adolescents' externalizing problems, higher cohesion and lower conflict in a parent-adolescent relationship, higher academic performance, intrinsic motivation, and academic self-efficacy as compared to authoritarian parenting or parental strictness ^{8,9,10,11,46,42,44}.

However, in some cases, indulgent parenting produces better outcomes than authoritative parenting ^{10,43}. This might be due to better outcomes of reasoning and warmth on adolescents' self-esteem. In minorities, authoritarian parenting leads to lower negative effects due to cultural norms and socialization processes ¹³.

Parental monitoring, open communication, high parental involvement in the adolescent's life, less permissive attitudes regarding sexual behaviour, high levels of education and employment, higher relationship quality with offspring, and fewer number of offspring are associated with adolescents' age-expected safe sexual behaviors ^{29,37,35,28,34,38,32,36,30,31,33}. While ³⁸ considers monitoring and communication of the opposite gender parent to be responsible for safe sex practices in adolescents, ^{39,32} consider a relationship with the same sex parent to be imperative in adopting safe sex practices. For adolescents in migration affected community poverty, parental delinquency, and volatile environment act as additional risk factors regarding sexual behaviors ⁴⁰. Although generally, sexual minority adolescents are less likely to be victims of abuse and depression, sexual minority women are more likely to suffer from alcohol abuse as adults than their male counterparts. Also, sexual orientation deviations are more likely in female adolescents than males. This might be because of the gender stereotypes prevalent in society that do not allow women to explore their sexuality in a way it allows men to and force women to conform to heterosexual norms ^{25,27,26}.

While frequent conflicts, parental relational churning, domestic violence, and unusual family structure trigger problems in adolescents of both genders, gender-specific findings suggest a difference in supervision with respect to adolescent problem behaviors and warmth in the treatment of girls and boys

by the parents^{17,18,19,17}. Besides, a difference is noticed in the pattern of conflict-management of mothers and fathers with adolescents^{21,16}. Such gender differences can be possibly attributed to the role of gender stereotypes prevalent in the culture.

Parental-adolescent relationships remain unaffected by the peer relationships of the adolescent since they do not compensate parental support with peer support⁵⁷. Parenting practices and parental interaction influence adolescent prosocial behavior but not the quality of adolescent friendship. Parental psychological control further influenced by adolescent behavioral problems leads to peer victimization experiences^{59,61}.

In adolescence, positive parenting leads to healthier stress outcomes and greater parental bonding leads to fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression. Adolescents of the eastern culture are more prone to anxiety than of the western culture although, with respect to social anxiety, we see uniform trends in adolescents across ethnicities^{52,51}.

With the onset of the pandemic, a change was observed in the parent-adolescent relational dynamics. While the mother-adolescent relationship was characterized by obedience and spending time together, the father-adolescent relationship was characterized by communication and performance of activities²². During this time, parents displayed an increase in negative affect and a significant association was established between subjective anxiety and prosocial behavior problems in adolescents⁵⁸. Moreover, lower parental support led to lowered academic motivation in adolescents. However, on average, self-confident parents were better able to prevent emotional dysregulation of their ward^{47,54}.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS:

- A. Attempts at cross-cultural studies of the differential practices and outcomes of a single parenting style. (For example, a comparative analysis of the practises and outcomes of the authoritative parenting style practiced by American and Indian parents)
- B. To understand the differences in outcomes of authoritarian and indulgent parenting across various ethnicities to arrive at a conclusion regarding their situational efficacy. (For example, a comparative analysis of the practices and outcomes of the authoritative and indulgent parenting styles practiced by the American and Hispanic population of the USA respectively)

- C. Comparison of gender differences in parenting behaviors and treatment of adolescents across masculine/feminine ethnicities, races, cultures, etc, i.e., cultures where strict gender stereotypes exist vs cultures where gender fluidity and equality exist. (For example, a comparative analysis of the gendered parenting practices and outcomes meted out by fathers and mothers towards adolescent boys and girls in Indian vs in Finland)
- D. Evaluative research on how gender stereotypes are internalized as set standards of behavior to be met in cultures of high masculinity. (For example, to evaluate the process of gendering girls and boys into stereotypes in the Indian cultural context)
- E. Comparison between (a)parenting practices and outcomes, (b)parental influence over peer relation dynamics (c)impact of the same gender and opposite gender parent on sexual behaviors of adolescents, and (d)mental wellness outcomes in adolescents of altered family dynamics. (For example, comparative analysis of coping techniques in adolescents exposed to marital discord, parental separation or IPV pre- and post-pandemic OR the effect of lockdown on the parent-adolescent relationship OR the influence of the parent-adolescent relationship over the adolescent-peer group relationship pre- and post-pandemic)
- F. Further research not focusing on parenting styles but on positive parenting practices (enhancing the strengths and qualities of the adolescent and the parents; tapping onto the better side of both parties) and establishing certain culture-convergent or culture-divergent guidelines for positive parenting.
- G. Further studies may focus on the neurochemical disturbances and use of psychoactive substances as risk factors for anxiety and stress in adolescents.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE SECTION:

- A. Funding: The authors have no funding to disclose
- B. Compliance with Ethical Standards: Not Applicable
- C. Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest

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