

Perceived Paternal Parenting Style and Social Competence

Janet Fernandes e De Souza and Priscilla Paul,
St Xavier's College, Goa. University of Mumbai, Maharashtra

The present study attempts to examine the influence of perceived paternal parenting style on the social competence of middle-school children. This study also attempts to explore gender differences in perceived paternal parenting style. The sample consists of 500 middle-school students, 250 boys and 250 girls, in the age range of 10-12 years. The sample was chosen from nuclear families, with both parents in the middle-income group. The PAQ and Social Competence Scale were used to collect data for the present study. Perceived Paternal Parenting Style has a significant influence on social competence. No significant gender differences exist in the perceived parenting style. The implications of the findings are discussed for practical application to enriched parenting.

Keywords: Perceived Paternal Parenting Style, Social Competence

The influence of the family on child development has been well documented in childhood literature and family studies. Parents play a significant role in bringing up a new generation and nurturing them to mature adulthood. From this perspective, a family is considered the cradle of future society. The parents play the role of nurturers and through their adopted parenting style, exert a powerful influence on the psychological development of their children. The beginning of the 1990s and the dawn of the twenty-first century witnessed a resurgence of interest in the role of a father and the concept of contemporary fatherhood. Women emancipation movements, feministic ideas, increasing maternal employment, changes in family structures and the added influence of globalisation have questioned the ideals of fatherhood as a mere breadwinner to give an increasing call to fathers to become true co-parents in childcare. The review of literature shows that fathers, with reference to childcare, are understudied. Hence, there is a need to study fathers in their new role of a nurturing caregiver, through a developmental perspective. This research study throws light on a new picture of paternal involvement in childcare responsibilities in the context of Goan nuclear families and provides a fresh impetus to fathers to examine their parenting styles in light of healthy child development.

Parenting styles is a psychological construct representing the standard strategies that parents use in raising their children. Baumrind, in a series of landmark studies (1967, 1971, 1978, 1989, 1991), gathered information on child-rearing practices by extensive observations and interviews with parents that resulted in the three most-well-known and influential typological approaches to parenting, namely, Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive. These parenting labels have been primarily characterised as consisting of varied combinations of responsiveness, demanding-ness and autonomy granting, and are useful in understanding the complex behaviours and attitudes of caregivers and how these relate to child outcomes.

The family provides the first socialisation environment for the child. Socialisation is the process whereby an individual's standards, skills, motives, attitudes and behaviours are influenced to conform to those regarded as desirable and appropriate for his or her present or future role in society. *Social competence* is the ability to emit both positively reinforcing behaviour towards others and to avoid emitting behaviour that involves punishment (Bandura, 1977). Through their behaviours, values and disciplinary practices, parents provide children with observational models that may or may not equip their children with the appropriate social skills and emotional regulation

and that are applied to all relationships outside the home.

Several studies have shown the positive benefits of social competence in various kinds of social situations and interactions. Children's social competence is a significant predictor of school adjustment (Wentzel, 2003; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). Socially competent children tend to be cooperative, responsible, have leadership skills (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997), achieve higher academic skills (Wentzel, 1998) and have a more dependable repertoire of the self regulatory behaviours essential for successful interpersonal behaviour (Potts, 2002; Wentzel & Watkins, 2002). Through a study, Segrin (1999) provides sufficient empirical evidence that links social competence to mental and physical health. For children, repeated peer rejection can have serious long-term consequences, including dropping out of school, committing juvenile offenses and suffering from psychopathology (Bagwell, Newcomb & Bukowski, 1998). Rejection can be traced, at least in part, to the influence of parents (Ladd & Lesieur, 1995). As expected from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977), children see how parents respond in different social situations and often imitate these responses later. Parents also contribute to their children's social skills and popularity through their disciplinary practices. Inconsistent discipline is associated with antisocial, aggressive behaviour, paving the way for rejection. Consistent punishment that does not rely upon power assertion but is tied to parental love and affection is more likely to promote social skills (Dekovic & Jansens, 1992). Studies conducted on adolescents have also shown that a family environment characterised by support, warmth and democratic practices is associated with socially valued characteristics and adjustment (Rath & Muni, 1997; Devgan, 1998; Zhon, 2002; Kaufmann, Gesten, Santa Lucia, Salcedo, Rendina-Gobioff & Gadd, 2000). These studies stress the importance of developing a higher level of social competence in children. Since social competence is linked to parenting styles, the present study seeks to explore the relationship of three parenting styles, namely, the Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive styles,

on the psychological variable of the social competence of middle-school students.

Hypotheses:

1. No significant gender differences would exist in perception of paternal parenting styles.
2. Children raised by the Authoritative parenting style would show significantly higher levels of social competence as compared to children raised by the Authoritarian/Permissive parenting style.

Operational Definition:

Parenting Styles: The parenting style of the father is assessed using the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ). This study considers three parenting styles: the Authoritarian parenting style, the Authoritative parenting style and the Permissive parenting style. These three parenting prototypes are derived from the phenomenological appraisal of the father's authority by their middle-school offspring. The dominant parental prototype that is indicated by the highest score on the PAQ is considered the parenting style of the father.

Social Competence: Social competence is assessed as measured by the Social Competence Scale. The five major factors measured are pro-social attitude, social competition, social leadership, social tolerance and social maturity. The scale gives a global score on social competence.

Method

Design:

The 2 x 3 Factorial design was used. The two factors refer to the respondents' gender, namely, male and female, and the three factors refer to the three parenting styles considered in the study, namely, Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive.

Sample:

The total sample for the study consisted of 500 middle-school students selected from 10 English medium schools from the state of Goa. Out of the 500 school students selected, 250 were boys and 250 were girls. All the respondents were day scholars from the middle school, selected from the school register through random sampling

with the following inclusion criteria: Students were in the age group of 10 – 12 years, living in a nuclear family with both parents belonging to a middle-income group (Rs. 15,000 – Rs. 20,000 per month).

Research tools:

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) pertaining to fathers: The PAQ developed by Buri (1991) was used to measure the Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive parental authority prototypes. The questionnaire consists of 30 items and yields Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive scores. Each of these scores is derived from the phenomenological appraisals of the parents' authority by their son or daughter. Scores on each style can vary from 10 to 50; the higher the score, the greater the appraised level of the parental authority prototype measured. The test-retest reliability coefficient was found to be 0.76. The scale is also shown to have acceptable discriminant and criterion-related validity.

Social Competence Scale: The scale developed by Sharma; Sukhla and Sukhla (1992) was used to obtain scores on social competence. It consists of 50 items measuring 18 factors of social skills and behaviours designed for Indian pupils between the ages of 10 and 15 years of both sexes. The maximum obtainable score is 250 and the lowest score is 50. The higher the score, the higher the level of social competence. The Test-Retest Reliability of the scale is 0.56 and the Inter-Rater reliability coefficient is found to be 0.67. The predictive validity of the scale ranged from 0.72 – 0.84.

Procedure:

The study was conducted on a sample of 500 middle-school students, selected by systematic random sampling, keeping in mind the criteria of selection, from English-medium schools in the state of Goa. The principals/heads of the selected schools were approached, and the nature and significance of the study was explained to them in order to obtain their cooperation for the conduct of the study. A suitable testing schedule was fixed during morning school hours and the researcher met the participant students in the classroom. The students were

explained the meaning and importance of the study and prepared to respond to the questionnaire truthfully. The research tools were administered to the students by the researcher herself. Instructions on how to respond to each questionnaire were read out, and any queries were immediately cleared. The entire testing schedule of approximately 60 minutes, with a short 10-minute break, was split into two testing sessions, each of approximately 25 minutes. After the testing session, the students and the heads/principals of the selected schools were thanked for their cooperation.

Results

Table 1. Gender-Wise Frequency, Percentage and Chi-Square Value

Sex	Authoritarian		Authoritative		Permissive		N	x ² (df 2) (NS)
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Boys	83	33	95	38	72	29	250	5.00 (df 2) (NS)
Girls	66	26	119	48	65	26	250	
N	149		214		137		500	

Table 1 presents gender differences on perceived paternal parenting style by frequency, percentage and the Chi-Square value of significance. Forty-eight percent of girls and 38% boys perceived their fathers' parenting style as Authoritative. Females, compared to males, reported lower levels of authoritarian parenting. The obtained Chi-Square value is not significant. This finding shows that although sex differences in perception of paternal parenting style exist, which is evident in frequency and percentage, the difference is not large enough to be statistically significant. Hence, the hypothesis that "No significant gender differences would exist in perception of paternal parenting styles" is supported.

Table 2. Mean, SD and F-Value on Social Competence

Parenting Styles	Mean	SD	F Value
Authoritarian	180.95	6.98	18.250**
Authoritative	184	7.90	
Permissive	179.20	7.38	

** p < 0.01

Table 2 indicates the mean, standard deviation and the F value on social competence with respect to parenting styles. The mean value of the Authoritarian style on social competence is relatively higher than the mean value of the Authoritarian and Permissive styles and the difference in the mean value on social competence between the Authoritarian and Permissive styles is small. The F value is found to be highly significant. This finding shows that children of Authoritative fathers have scored significantly higher on social competence than to children of Authoritarian fathers and Permissive fathers. Post-hoc test of Multiple Comparisons (Scheffe) between the means of the Authoritarian, Authoritative and Permissive parenting styles on social competence showed that there is a significant difference in social competence between the means of Authoritarian parenting and Authoritative parenting (3.14, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, the mean difference between the Authoritative and Permissive parenting styles on social competence is significant (4.88, $p < 0.05$). However, the mean difference on social competence between the Authoritarian and Permissive parenting styles is not found to be significant. This finding confirms that children of Authoritative fathers scored higher on social competence than children of Authoritarian and Permissive fathers. The finding supports the hypothesis that "Children raised by the Authoritative parenting style would show significantly higher levels of social competence as compared to children raised by an Authoritarian/ Permissive parenting style".

Table 3: Mean, SD and F Value on Social Competence for Boys

Parenting styles	N	Mean	SD	F value
Authoritarian	83	180.70	6.85	6.504*
Authoritative	95	183.34	7.78	
Permissive	72	179.38	7.08	

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 indicates mean, SD and F value on social competence for boys with respect to parenting styles. The Authoritative parenting style shows a relatively higher mean value on social competence as compared to the Authoritarian and

Permissive parenting styles. The F value ($F = 6.504$; $df 2,247$) was found to be significant. This shows that boys who have authoritative fathers score significantly higher on social competence than compared to boys who have Authoritarian / Permissive fathers.

Table 4: Mean SD and F Value of Parenting Styles on Social Competence for Girls

Parenting styles	N	Mean	SD	F value
Authoritarian	66	181.26	7.17	12.141**
Authoritative	119	184.68	7.98	
Permissive	65	179.02	7.75	

** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 indicates mean, SD and F value on social competence for girls with respect to parenting styles. The mean values on social competence differ among parenting styles. The Authoritative style shows a higher mean on social competence than the Authoritarian and Permissive parenting styles. The F value ($F = 12.14$; $df 2,247$) was found to be highly significant. This finding shows that girls raised in the Authoritative parenting style score significantly higher on social competence in comparison to girls raised in the Authoritarian/Permissive parenting style.

Discussion

The present study provides valuable insights with respect to perception of parenting styles by offspring and towards the role of fathers in promoting social competence among his children. It is fortunate that a larger number of children (214) perceive their fathers as Authoritative in their child-rearing practices. However, a sizeable number of children perceive their fathers as Authoritarian or Permissive. The perception of Authoritative parenting among fathers by their children has an important implication for future parenting. An Authoritative approach to fathering has the potential of imparting gender equitable attitudes, values and behaviours and provides models of competent parenting, caring concern and support. It appears that children of Authoritative fathers will have an opportunity to develop an androgynous gender role identity that is a useful prerequisite to flexibly adjust to a dynamic globalised society. Moreover, the practices of fatherhood are related to gender identity and to men's experiences with

their own fathers. Hoffereth (1999) found that men whose fathers were involved in raising them were found to be more involved with their own children, to take more responsibility for them, to show more warmth and to closely monitor their behaviours and activities. Hence, Authoritative fathers provide models of true co-parenting to their sons who will be the fathers of tomorrow. This finding also does not support the cultural notion of "a strict father", a tendency to believe that fathers are generally distant and authoritarian in their interactions with their children. Authoritative parenting, which is based on the democratic concepts of equality and trust, creates an emotional climate of warmth, support, autonomy, responsibility and disciplined conformity, which together serve to clearly provide pathways to healthy adjustment and mature social development.

The present study also points to the significant relationship between parenting styles and the development of social competence in their offspring. Authoritative parenting styles created an environment conducive to the development of higher levels of social competence in children as compared to the authoritarian and permissive styles. Previous research studies conducted on preschoolers and adolescents by Baumrind (1991) and Rath and Muni (1997) also highlight the importance of a family environment characterised by support, encouragement, warmth and realistic feedback (characteristics of authoritative parenting) in creating an emotional climate conducive to the development of social competence among adolescents. Another study conducted in India showed that homes that combined warmth and democratic procedures (Authoritative approach) developed into resourceful, socially competent and friendly individuals (Devgan, 1998). Adolescents who described their parents as authoritative scored highest on measures of social adjustment (Kaufman et al., 2000). Also, Parke and Buriel (1998) found children of Authoritarian parents to be less socially skilled. The increased benefit of Authoritative parenting in the development of higher levels of social competence in children can be traced to a combined synthesis of responsiveness and demanding-ness. In addition,

these parents encourage verbal give and this type of family discussion is likely to help children to understand social relationships and what is required to be socially competent (Kuczynski & Lollis, 2002). In contrast, the Authoritarian parenting style is characterised by low warmth and affection, unquestioning obedience to authority and suppression of children's self-expression and independence. The harshness of this style creates fewer opportunities for meaningful social interactions and social learning experiences that promote social competence and popularity. Similarly, the Permissive parenting style that is characterised by high warmth and acceptance but no exercise of control and regulation of behaviour create inconsistency and confusion with social norms and socially acceptable behaviour. Hence, demanding-ness alone, or responsiveness alone, is not enough to foster a higher level of social competence in children, but a combination of both dimensions is essential for adequate development of social competence, which is evident in the present study findings. Indian culture is a collectivistic culture, which is other-oriented. Creating a home environment suitable for the development of social competence skills equips the child to meet the requirements and challenges of a collectivistic culture. Given the benefits of a high level of social competence for children, the present research finding opens an imperative to parents, especially fathers, to adopt an authoritative approach to child rearing. Social competence is an important ingredient of modern civilisation, and is an essential attribute of the members of a progressive, onward society.

Implications

This study serves as an addition to the increasing interest in fatherhood roles and childcare responsibilities in the Indian context. The fast-changing family scenario in India and a constant shift in values and lifestyles are changing the nature of the father's involvement in childcare and family life and are, in turn, affecting the children's and father's developmental trajectories. The findings of the present study support the utility of an adult developmental perspective of fatherhood and have implications for psycho-educational programs. The findings may serve as a valuable resource in developing need-based

educational programs for fathers, designed to create a better understanding of the tasks that parenting involves. Programs designed to encourage fathers to assume more-active parental roles to enrich family living need to be designed. In addition, adopting an authoritative approach to child rearing opens a new window of learning for the children of today to construct their expectations about the roles of fathers as they become the parents of tomorrow. Since boys learn the concept of fatherhood from their own fathers, more-involved fathers provide a gender-equitable conceptualisation of fatherhood to their sons, who are more likely to adopt the same approach to parenting their own children in adulthood.

Limitations

This study does not consider the interaction effect between the mother's and father's parenting styles on social competence. This study only focuses on the father's parenting style.

Conclusion

Within the limitations of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn: Although there are gender differences in the perception of paternal parenting styles, these differences are not significant. The Authoritative parenting style fosters significantly higher levels of social competence for both boys and girls in comparison to the Authoritarian or Permissive parenting styles. Children are the future of the society and country at large. Any strategy or intervention that leads to an improvement in the child's wellbeing is a valued investment for the betterment of the child, the parents, the society and the country at large. This study hopes to broaden the horizons of effective fathering. A harmonious home in which consistent, democratic childcare procedures predominate would appear to be a desirable goal towards which all parents should strive in terms of their own happiness as well of as that of their children.

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Janet Fernandes e De Souza, PhD, Assistant Professor, St Xavier's College, Goa

Priscilla Paul, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Applied Psychology,
University of Mumbai, Maharashtra

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