# Perceived Parenting and Cognitive Distortions Among School Girls

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Parents play a crucial role in the socialization process of children, which in turn affects how they behave, think, and feel throughout their life. It has been observed that children's perception of the kind of parenting they receive, also plays a crucial role in shaping their thoughts. Numerous research postulates that parenting styles affect a number of cognitive aspects. In order to investigate and comprehend the connection between perceived parenting and cognitive distortions (i.e., negatively biased thought patterns), the current study was conducted. It endeavours to study different domains of perceived parenting of mothers and fathers individually in the present times and tries to understand which of these domains tend to have a relation with the negative biases of thinking styles. The data was collected from 260 adolescent girls (16-18 years), using Perception Of Parents Scale (POPS), HIT-16Q, and Self-Debasing Cognitive Distortions Scale (SDCDS). Upon analyzing data, it was found that perceived parenting of both mothers and fathers significantly related with self-serving and self-debasing cognitive distortions among adolescents. The results draw attention to the significance of adequate parenting, lack of which might lead to development of negatively biased beliefs and thoughts among adolescents. The findings can be beneficial for counselors and parents in understanding the importance of mindful and conscious parenting.

**Keywords**: adolescents, cognitive distortions, girls, parenting.

Adolescence is a transitional stage of life accompanied by numerous changes. These changes are not just confined to a person's physiology, but also include changes in thoughts, emotions, and overall personality of an individual. According to the psychosocial stages defined by Eric Erikson in the 1950s, the age of adolescence is that of 'Identity vs. Role Confusion'. As the name suggests, individuals at this stage are met with conflicts whereby they either successfully make an identity for themselves or are overpowered by the confusion of roles that are placed on them by society. Social interactions, interpersonal relationships, cognitive processes, as well as socioemotional concerns like depression and anxiety, have a significant impact on people's identities. It is noteworthy that studies have found a link between identity formation and depression, anxiety, cognitive processes, and thinking styles (Becht et al., 2016; Klimstra & Denissen, 2017; Kaur & Tung, 2019; Zhang, 2008). Hence, it becomes important to understand adolescents' thought patterns and their perception of interpersonal relationships in order to comprehend their developmental process and the issues that come with it. One of the prime and significant relationships in an individual's life is the relationship they share with their parents. The study of parent-child dynamics and its perception can hence provide rich insights about the development of adolescents.

## Perceived Parenting

The behaviours that parents exhibit while raising their children constitute their parenting style. On the basis of research work by Baumrind (1971) and Maccoby & Martin (1983) parenting style can be classified into 4 major types: Authoritative, Authoritarian, Indulgent and Neglectful. This classification is based on varying degrees of warmth (or responsiveness) and control (or demandingness). Looking at these parental dimensions from the point of view of children is what constitutes *Perceived Parenting*. It refers to the opinions held by children about the attitudes and behaviours exhibited by their parents and influences the child-outcomes in various ways. For instance, adolescents who perceived their parents to be warm and involved were reported to have good psychological development and a purpose in life, whereas the perception of one's parents as rather authoritarian or permissive was associated with reduced autonomy and personal growth (Francis et al., 2021). In the academic domain, it has been found out that adolescents who perceive their mothers and fathers to be rejecting report poor academic performance and low achievement motivation (Rahman et al., 2021), whereas maternal acceptance is found to be positively related with GPA scores (Khan et al., 2010).

## Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are incorrect ways of thinking that are negatively biased. The concept of cognitive distortions was originally addressed in 1979 by Beck et al., and according to the American Psychological Association (APA), they are "faulty or inaccurate thinking, perception, or belief" (1979). Burns (1980) identified 10 typical thinking errors- All or None Thinking, Mental Filtering, Catastrophizing, Overgeneralization, Personalization, Mind Reading, Labeling, Emotional Reasoning,

Should Statements, Minimizing. Although there are many different cognitive distortions that might be researched, the current research focuses on two main groups:

1.  *Self-Serving Cognitive Distortions*: negatively biased thinking patterns whereby a person values one's immediate views, beliefs and feelings to such an extent that they disregard the opinions and views of others.

2.  *Self-Debasing Cognitive Distortions*: thinking patterns that are negatively biased in a way that a person devalues or disregards his or her own self.

Cognitive distortions have been found to be associated with externalizing (anti-social behaviour, violence, etc.) and internalizing behaviour (depression, anxiety, etc.) problems (Banerjee et al., 2021; Barrriga et al., 2016).

## The Present Study

Social system and environment play a huge role in the formation and propagation of negative biases of thinking style. In the urban Indian setup, adolescent girls frequently sway between whether to follow the thoughts and beliefs propagated by parents either explicitly or implicitly, or to explore and broaden the thought patterns and belief systems that define them. These decisions pertaining to development of thought patterns and identity are partly influenced by how involved, warm, or supportive they perceive their parents to be. As is reported in previous literature, parental relationships and socioemotional issues are two major factors that have an impact on adolescents' identity development and management (Kaniusonyte & Zukauskiene, 2018; Rezvan et al., 2017; Becht et al., 2016). According to recent research, cognitive distortions, depression, and anxiety are becoming more prevalent among Indian adolescent girls (Maurya et al., 2016;

Maheshwari & Chadha, 2021) and specially so in urban adolescents (Jayashree et al., 2018; Shukla et al., 2019; Raja et al., 2020; Joseph & Guzman, 2021).Hence, it is imperative to approach these issues from different perspectives in order to gain a deeper understanding and offer better solutions. One such perspective could be understanding the relationship between adolescents' perception of their parents and the presence of cognitive distortions in their own thinking patterns. The negative biases of thinking style, or cognitive distortions are developed as a result of social and environmental interactions. As parents are the major contributors of a child's life experiences, it becomes important to understand how the perception of parental behaviours might affect the development of cognitive distortions. Previous studies in the field of parenting have largely focused on parenting styles, which is a fairly broad phrase. It is better and simpler to comprehend parenting through the ideas that comprise those parenting styles while attempting to delve into perceived parenting. For this reason, the researchers in this study have focused on parenting in terms of three aspects (warmth, autonomy, and involvement) that are essential to parenting approaches. Keeping this in mind, the present study was conducted with the following objective: *To study the relationship between perceived parenting and cognitive distortions.*

### Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the present study are as follows:

$H_1$. There will be a significant relationship between perceived parenting of mothers and self-serving cognitive distortions.

$H_2$. There will be a significant relationship between perceived parenting of mothers and self-debasing cognitive distortions.

$H_3$. There will be a significant relationship between perceived parenting of fathers and self-serving cognitive distortions.

$H_4$. There will be a significant relationship between perceived parenting of fathers and self-debasing cognitive distortions.

### Method

### Sample

The sample of the current study consisted of school going adolescent girls (N=260) ranging in age from 16 to 18 years ($M_{age}$= 17.26, SD= 1.30) who were enrolled in co-educational schools in Delhi-NCR. Students were approached after gaining permission from the school administration. For the purpose of the research, the students were screened based on the following criteria- girls from nuclear families, those who have been living with their parents and had not been to any kind of boarding school or hostel for any duration of time. Students who fit this description were included in the study. Majority of the participants' fathers were working beyond home and mothers were homemakers. Keeping these criteria in mind, Purposive Sampling Technique was used in data collection.

### Tools

*Perception of Parents Scale (POPS)*: It was developed by Robbins in 1994 and comprises of 42 items (21 each for mother and father). It is a 7-point Likert scale measuring 3 dimensions of perceived parenting (Involvement, Autonomy Support & Warmth) for both parents separately.

*HIT-16Q*: It was developed by Ara & Shah in 2015. It is a 6-point Likert scale consisting of 16 items and measures self-serving cognitive distortions.

*Self-Debasing Cognitive Distortions Scale (SDCDS)*: It was developed by Ara in 2016. It is a 5-point Likert scale and has 16 items in total that measure the self-debasing cognitive distortions.

All the questionnaires used in the present study are reliable and valid in the present times and have been used in various Indian studies (Shylla & KG, 2021; Malik et al., 2022).

## Procedure

The present study is a part of a project having a sample size of 533 participants having boys and girls both. From this total sample, data of 260 girls were selected based on the above discussed criteria. They were briefed about the study after forming a rapport. All the ethical considerations of confidentiality and informed consent were maintained. After obtaining the filled questionnaires, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation. Few response sheets were discarded during the data cleaning process and 260 forms were retained. Those final forms were scored, and data was then entered in SPSS (version 21) for analysis. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was calculated to understand the relationship between the different dimensions of perceived parenting and cognitive distortions.

## Ethical Concern

As the study was conducted on human participants, it was ensured that research ethics are followed at every stage of the research. The informed consent was obtained from all the participants and their briefing was done. The confidentiality of the participants was also maintained and the data collected was used for the sole purpose of research. The participants were also apprised of their rights, like the right to withdraw from the research at any step.

## Results

Table 1. Inter-correlation matrix between dimensions of perceived parenting of mothers and cognitive distortions.

| Perceived Parenting | Cognitive Distortions | |
|---|---|---|
| | Self-Serving | Self-Debasing |
| Involvement | -0.079 | -0.602** |
| Autonomy Support | -0.200 | -0.597** |
| Warmth | -0.114 | -0.738** |

Note: **- significant at the 0.01 level and *- significant at the 0.05 level

Table 1 shows Self-Debasing Cognitive Distortions were related significantly and negatively with Involvement (r=-.602, p<.01), Autonomy Support (r=-.597, p<.01), and Warmth (r=-.738, p<.01) dimensions of perceived parenting of mothers. On the contrary, self-serving cognitive distortions did not show any significant relationship with any dimension of perceived parenting. Therefore, hypothesis H1 "*There will be a significant relationship between perceived parenting of mothers and self-serving cognitive distortions*" is rejected. On the other hand, hypothesis H2 "*There will be a significant relationship between perceived parenting of mothers and self-debasing cognitive distortions*" is accepted.

Table 2. Inter-correlation matrix between dimensions of perceived parenting of fathers and cognitive distortions.

| Perceived Parenting | Cognitive Distortions | |
|---|---|---|
| | Self-Serving | Self-Debasing |
| Involvement | -0.219 | -0.508** |
| Autonomy Support | -0.005 | -0.760** |
| Warmth | -0.143 | -0.570** |

Note: **- significant at the 0.01 level and *- significant at the 0.05 level

Table 2 shows a significant and negative relationship between Self-Debasing Cognitive Distortions and Involvement (r=-.508, p<.01), Autonomy Support (r=-.760, p<.01), and Warmth (r=-.570, p<.01) dimensions of perceived parenting of fathers. On the contrary, self-serving cognitive distortions were not found to be significantly related with any dimension of fathers' perceived parenting. Therefore, hypothesis H3 "There will be a significant relationship between perceived parenting of fathers and self-serving cognitive distortions" is rejected. On the other hand, hypothesis H4 "There will be a significant relationship between perceived parenting of fathers and self-debasing cognitive distortions" is accepted.

## Discussion

Based on the results presented in the previous section, it could be implied that adolescents who perceive their parents to be involved, warm, supportive and autonomy granting are less susceptible to self-debasing cognitive distortions. Similar results are reported by previous researchers whereby support of mothers was found to have a protective influence on their children from developing any maladaptive cognitive schemas (Pellerone et al., 2017), and maternal rejection was found to be associated with developing negative self-schemas and negative automatic thoughts (Garber & Flynn, 2001). Similarly, different dimensions of perceived parenting of fathers are found to be significantly related with cognitive distortions (Begum, 2013). In yet another study it was found that the more the individuals perceive their parents to be neglectful, higher are the chances of them developing depression, mediated by dysfunctional cognitive style (McGinn et al., 2005). Cognitive vulnerability to depression is also found to be related with harsh parenting (Poletti et al., 2014).

On observing the correlation coefficients of the parenting dimensions with cognitive distortions, it was observed that Autonomy Support of fathers has a stronger relationship with self-debasing cognitive distortions as compared to that of mothers. On the contrary, perceived Involvement and Warmth of mothers exhibited a higher correlation coefficient value than that of fathers. From these observations, it could be inferred that despite changes in traditional approaches to parenting, fathers are still viewed as authority figures while mothers are considered a source of nurturance and care. This could also be a result of deep-rooted patriarchy in the Indian family system. Therefore, it implies that though the parenting values and roles are changing in the urban Indian context (Sondhi, 2017), children still look for warmth and involvement from mothers and independence and autonomy from fathers, and these perceptions could be influential in the context of thought patterns of adolescent girls.

However, the study establishes that no significant relationship exists between self-serving cognitive distortions and perceived parenting. Therefore, it might be possible that additional factors determine the manifestation of self-serving cognitive distortions. According to prior research the development of such cognitive distortions is linked with moral development, exposure to community violence, etc. (Gibbs, 2013; Dragone et al., 2020). In lieu of the Indian context as well, in the present study participants were girls from urban family setups, wherein, parents usually tend to deter from showcasing violence in front of their daughters and are very protective of them. Also, in Indian culture, which is largely patriarchal in nature, girls are expected to be calm, humble, and refrain from being aggressive and violent (Moral). Hence, it could be insinuated that factors other than parenting might have a role to play in the development of self-serving cognitive distortions among girls.

Girls at this life stage are subjected to several layers of vulnerability due to physiological changes and social norms. These transitions and the kind of relationship adolescents have with their families might play a part in their identity formation (Branje, 2022). Parental behaviours, as perceived by the child at this age can aid or hinder their development by altering their thought patterns. These thought patterns that are developed through the process of socialization also influence other facets of an individual's life, like increased vulnerability to depression, decreased life satisfaction, etc. (Dozois & Beck, 2008; Simsek et al., 2021). Therefore, on the basis of literature quoted so far and the findings of the present study, it could be said that working on parent-child dynamics as perceived by the child may better equip them to deal with their identity related issues.

## Conclusion

Parenting plays an important role in the life of children and this role isn't just limited to childhood but continues its effect throughout the life of an individual. The present study is one such attempt to understand this influence in the cognitive domain. The study has its implications in understanding parental behaviours that can have an impact on adolescents' cognitive development. It could also help the counselors in understanding cognitive distortions experienced by adolescent girls through the lens of parents' role in socialization. Further research in this area could take into consideration other socializing agents, role of culture, and could also incorporate a qualitative angle for deeper insights.

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