

## Perception of Authoritative Mothers About Their Single Children's Social Adjustment in The Environment

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### ABSTRACT

The current study focuses on the perception of mothers who have adopted authoritative parenting styles about their single children's social adjustment in their environments. The author tried to examine how in the Indian context, the authoritative parenting style affects the social adjustment in children, especially in single children. In this paper, the researcher tried to bring an original contribution by identifying what is missing in the literature. A lot of researches have been done on describing or examining the relationship between the perceived parenting styles and social adjustment among children adopting a quantitative research design but very little researches have been done with the same variables in the Indian context, especially taking single children into consideration as well as by adopting a qualitative research design. By adopting a qualitative research design, the researcher tried to understand the phenomenon by taking semi-structured interviews from five mothers who adopted authoritative parenting style. The research findings revealed that the mothers who allow their children some freedom and allow them to explore the social environment along with some rules and regulations tend to have limited but better social relationships as well as share a better relationship with both the parents. The single child shares a special bond with his/her mother where the mother lives up too many roles including that of a friend. The research finding was accompanied by certain recommendations.

**Keywords:** *Authoritative Parenting Style, Concept of Freedom, Mother-Child Relationship, Single Children, Social Adjustment*

India is known for its diverse culture which might include diversities in terms of ethnicity, people, language, religion, culture, caste, etc. When it comes to taking into consideration the diversity of our country, an important and effective system that functions in our society is the system of family. India possessing a collectivist culture gives family the utmost importance and value. According to our culture, all the essential themes and values that an individual learns are learned within the boson of the family.

Family is the immediate environment that a child comes in contact with as soon as he or she is born. It plays some significant role in development of emotional intelligence and psychological well-being among children (Ambhore & Puri, 2019). Parents are the most

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Received: July 07, 2021; Revision Received: August 08, 2021; Accepted: August 23, 2021

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important organization in an individual's life. The influence of parents on a child could affect him in many ways, i.e., positively as well as negatively. They help the individual to build up their personality, and build up the confidence to go out in the society and make a new identity.

The most important thing that comes up while understanding the relationship between the parents and a child is that what kind of parenting style does the parents adopt and how that has an impact on the child be it in terms of his cognitive, emotional or social development. As today's world is changing with a fast pace, a child can face various conflicts regarding different values followed by the parents and the current norms being followed in the society and also the changes in the social structure. Especially a child who is the only child of his parents has to cope a lot with the norms and the values of the changing world. According to Adler, a single child is always in a shadow of parents and they are too much careful about the child. Such a child is unable to take his or her own decisions in life and has no one to play or talk of his age group in a home and his adjustment among friends is below average.

Single child families, i.e., a two parents family having one single child has their own pros and cons. It can be said that where there are certain advantages of these types of families, there are some disadvantages as well. In this type of family, the child as well as the parents enjoy a closer bond with each other as the entire focus of the parents is on the child. The child also does not face any sibling rivalry rather gets his/her personal space. The parents also on the other hand feels a lot relieved from the financial pressure and they also do not have to constantly strive for privacy. The cons of this type of family structure are that since we know that parents play a very important role in overall development of an individual, along with parents, siblings also play a very important role in the development of an individual. Siblings dominantly help an individual to develop social skills such as being cooperative with others and the basic concept of sharing.

Human being is a social animal and in order to survive in this world, individuals have to continuously interact with each other in order to survive and to fulfil their basic needs. Adjustment can be considered as a behavioural process by which an individual maintains equilibrium in their needs in order to survive various obstacles in the environment. Similarly, social adjustment can be referred to as the adjustments which an individual makes in order to fulfil his/her physical as well psychological need and also to get comfortable in the society through social interactions with the others present in the social environment (Indrajeet Dutta, 2016).

Adolescence is a very important phase in an individual's life as from childhood to adolescent, the children are always in the shadow of their parents and when they enter in this phase, they begin to enter into a completely new phase of their life as they begin to try new things and explore their immediate as well as external environment. They tend to get new experiences and gain a new autonomous identity. In some cultures, like that of India, parents still do exercise certain control over their children in their adolescence and does not provide a complete autonomy to the child. They have certain power over decision making in children. As the child moves into the phase of adolescence, the behaviour he shows is based on the understanding of the societal values and norms which are shaped by his family and parents and hence parents do play an important role in this process as according to this shaping of the understanding of values and norms, he uses this behaviour to adjust in the surrounding and adapt to the basic needs of the society.

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Baumrind's theory of parenting style was given by Diana Baumrind. She developed this theory based on her observations of behaviour from children and how their parents influenced that behaviour. She made her observations and gave three parenting styles – authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting style. According to her, authoritative parenting style is the most accepting parenting style as it involves high acceptance and involvement. The parents adopting this parenting style are warm, responsive, attentive, patient and sensitive to their children needs. Authoritarian parenting style adopted by parents are less accepting and are less involved. These parents are mostly criticizing in nature, i.e., might be criticizing their child at almost each and every thing, and are mostly rejecting in nature. Permissive parenting style, parents using this style are not strict with rule enforcement at all. These parents respond to the needs of a child without regard to rules or consequences.

The current study would redound to the benefit of the society. Parenting styles play an essential role in the development of the child. This becomes altogether more important when it comes to single child. These days it is seen that a lot of parents decide on to have a single child so this study play a lot of significance in the present time. It would help the society to understand and know how through adopting various types of parenting styles, it can affect their child in many ways and especially when it comes to social adjustment. This would also help the parents to get more sensitized towards the problems faced by an adolescent in his/her social settings and especially a single child who might face a lot more problems than a child with siblings around him. Social adjustment is an issue which a lot of children face so this study would give an insight to the parents as to how they can bring about a change in the difficulties faced by the child by just bringing a change in their parenting style. This research would provide an insight to the society as well, through the perception of mothers about the parenting style adopted by them and how it contributes in the social adjustment of their children.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Research Design*

Qualitative research design was used in this research through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were used to collect primary data by conducting in-depth interviews on five mothers who have adopted authoritative parenting style and who have single children. This research design was used to typically revealing “how” and in “what” ways does authoritative parenting style affect the social adjustment in single children by focusing on some “real-life” incidents and contexts as perceived by the mother about their single children.

#### *Selection of the Sample*

The five mothers for the interview process was selected through a screening process using a questionnaire known as Parenting Style and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ). This includes 32 items forming three patterns of Parenting: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. This yields a self-report measure and a spouse-report measure for authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting for mothers and for fathers. Therefore, the five mothers were selected through this screening process and those mothers were selected who adopted authoritative parenting style along with those who just have single children.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study focuses on perception of mothers about the social adjustment of their single children. It particularly focuses on the perception of authoritative mothers about the social adjustment of their single children. According to the review of literature as pertaining to this study, parenting styles could include behaviours such as assisting children in their social actions, empowering them to support others on their own, and observing their activities both within and outside the home (Habibi, 2021). Authoritative parenting style, especially, is considered to be the most accepting and beneficial for all dimensions of adolescent development (Broante-Tinkew et al., 2006; Steinberg, 2001). It is seen that Indian society reflects all types of parenting styles but traditionally it is found that a specific parenting style that can be seen here is the Authoritarian Parenting Style (Shen, 2011). According to the interviews conducted, it was revealed that the mothers wanted an environment in the house where each of the family members gets their own space, provide an environment to their child when s/he can openly share whatever they want to and along with it maintain a strict environment in the house for the betterment of their child.

Three themes were extracted from the interviews conducted – Role of mother as a friend, philosopher and guide, importance of specific parenting strategies, and interaction of the adolescent with the social environment.

### *Role of mother as a friend, philosopher and guide*

One important theme that arises is that of the relationship between the mother and the adolescent. In this study it is seen that for a proper development of the child in every domain, the child's relationship with the mother plays a very important role. It is the mother who is the primary care giver for the child and especially for single child. It has also come out in the study that both the child and the mother share a very special bond with each other and the mothers describe this relationship as more of friends.

It was mentioned by Mother A – *“Being a mother of a single child, I have to play both the role of mother and a friend.”*

Another important thing that comes out from the study is that where the mothers are playing both the roles of being a friend as well as the mother, since adolescence is a very critical age, mother also have to pay attention to the fact that their child do not get in bad company and hence has to keep an eye on them as well and make sure that they do not go on the wrong path.

As mentioned by Mother D – *“M. has a habit of studying at night and during that time she wants me to sit with her. She tells me that I can do whatever I want to be it doing something on my phone but I am not allowed to sleep till the time she is awake and studying.”*

This aspect reveals which other mothers have also mentioned that their children do not have a very large friend circle and hence mostly their children prefers to stay at home and therefore, they try to get involved with their mother, either by asking them to stay with them while they are awake just for the sake of having her around, or by getting involved with her and helping her in household chores.

As mentioned by Mother B – *“S. has his own space and the freedom that he wants, but I intervene when I feel that he is moving on to the wrong path.”*

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This aspect reveals that the mother wants her child to have his own freedom to explore but also at the same time she intervenes whenever he feels that he is going on to a wrong path. This reveals the aspect of care that the mother holds for her child and which Alfred Adler also explained in his theory of birth order where he says that an only child is always in the shadow of his parents and as a result the parents are always overprotective of their child.

This theme specifically reveals that this study focuses on mother who adopted authoritative parenting style, share a relationship with their child such that the mothers provide them with their own space so that they have their own freedom to form effective social connections at home with other family members as well as outside in the society. Along with providing them with their own space, the mothers do lay down some rules and regulations in order to intervene whenever they feel that their child does not get in wrong company or social group.

### ***Interaction of adolescent with the social environment***

An important aspect that comes up in this study is that of the adolescent's interaction with the social environment. Since, the primary focus is on that of the social adjustment of the adolescent, two sub themes that emerge under this – interaction and relationship with the social group and interaction in the school environment. According to the review of literature – Adolescence is a critical period in an individual's life as he/she has to go through a lot of changes physically, psychologically as well as has to undergo changes in their social environment (Santrok, 2004). During this age, parents have certain expectations from their children in this age to achieve certain goals (Deb, 2001) and hence can have an effect on the overall personality of an adolescent.

This theme reveals that the adolescents are comfortable with the existing group of friends and comfortably makes new friends as well. It was also seen that the adolescents who are the only child of their parents have a very limited group of friends and does enjoy a pinch of solitude in their life.

According to Mother C – *“S. has limited friends but along with this has different set of friends – a group for studying, a group for playing, a group of Hindi-speakers and a completely different group of English-speakers. He does not like to spend long hours at his friend's place. In his free time, rather, he like reading novels extensively, drawing the characters of the novel through his imagination.”*

This aspect reveals that the child has a limited number of friends but categorizes his group of friends according to his interests. The adolescent does like spending time with his friends but on the other hand does like to have his own personal space and time in which he likes to do what interests him the most.

As mentioned, my mother E – *“V. does not have a problem sharing when it comes to sharing of a food item but yes, she does feel this insecurity when it comes to her very personal belongings. The things that she is attached to, she would never share those things with others. Even when it comes to me, she becomes a little jealous, say, when I look at a small child or show my affection towards that child, she would ask me to give all my love and affection to that child only.”*

This aspect reveals that the adolescent who is a single child might experience a difficulty sharing things to which they are most attached to, that might include having an insecurity

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with sharing the mother's love and attention. This aspect is supported by other researches as well, for instance, the cons of single child family structure are that since we know that parents play a very important role in overall development of an individual, along with parents, siblings also play a very important role in the development of an individual. Siblings dominantly help an individual to develop social skills such as being cooperative with others and the basic concept of sharing (Sabnam Sultana, 2017).

According to Mother A – *“S. is a well-mannered child when it comes to being outside her social environment. Especially, when it comes to being in the school environment, she gets along with her class-mates really well. She is a well-achieving child in terms of her progress in studies. She participates in extra-curricular activities, which I feel is very important when it comes to expanding a social circle with similar interests.”*

This aspect reveals that along with expecting a child to expand his/her social group but along with this the focus is on achieving his/her goals and for this it is very important to have a progress in both studies and extra-curricular activities which helps the child develop scholastic as well as social skills. As seen in the literature as well, in this age of adolescence, parents have certain expectations from their children to achieve certain goals (Deb, 2001) and hence can have an effect on the overall personality of an adolescent.

### ***Perceived parenting strategies***

As seen in the interviews conducted as well as the review of the literature, authoritative parenting style is the most appropriate parenting style for a child's overall development. According to the researches done in the field of parenting styles, it is believed that authoritative parenting style is linked to many aspects of competence, especially to social interaction at an older age (Baumrind and Black, 1967). This parenting style involves having a warm, responsive and attentive relationship with the child and being sensitive to his/her needs. Since, traditionally, Indian society has been following an authoritarian parenting style (Shen, 2011), this study aimed towards seeking perceptions of mothers who adopted the authoritative parenting style in this changing society.

It is seen in this study that mothers when asked about what specific parenting strategies can be employed in order to help the adolescent adjust better in his/her environment, it was seen that they all believed in providing an environment where they are willing to provide freedom to their child but with some restrictions. They make themselves available for the child, in case he/she is experiencing any problem, be it in their personal or social life.

According to Mother A – *“It is very important to accept the child's shortcomings. It is important to enhance communication with the child, understand each other and try and learn about each other. As a parent, we should help the child to build their confidence, and motivate them and making an extra effort so that they discuss with us if they are experiencing any problem.”*

This aspect reveals that the mother believes that in order to help the child better adjust in her social environment, it is necessary to enhance a better communication with the child, trying to understand what the adolescent is experiencing and try to learn about each other and working it both ways, i.e., from both mother and adolescent's side. It is very important for the adolescent to build up their confidence in order to adjust better in the environment and hence for that the parent can make an extra effort to do so. According to Baumrind (1966),

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the authoritative parents provide guidance to their children on issue oriented and rational manner. Since the level of demandingness is higher in this parenting style, parents usually welcome effective communication as well as effective relationship between them (Piko & Balazs, 2012).

According to Mother E – *“build confidence in each other. If she has any problem, she can come to me and discuss her problem. If she is feeling stressed out, then so much confidence I want to build in her that should come to me and speak to me about it.”*

This aspect reveals that the mother would like to build so much confidence in her child that she can go forward and explore the world around but at the same time she knows that her mother is always by her side. Even if she experiences any problems in her way, she can easily approach her mother for guidance and support. According to the mother, she provides a very positive environment to the child, such that the child has so much confidence in the mother that she is able to share everything with her, even the most distressing situations. This strategy would help the adolescent to move forward in her life without any hesitation and hence can go about exploring the social environment quite easily as she knows that she has a friend, a philosopher and a guide in her mother.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research tries to expand the knowledge and understanding about how in Indian context and society, traditionally, authoritarian parenting style is considered to be the most appropriate for raising children but nowadays as the world is constantly changing and so is the Indian society, parents are now moving towards adopting a parenting style where they want to give some amount of freedom to their child but along with it their would be some rules and regulations that has to be kept in mind. Specifically, when considering adolescents who are single children of their parents, they are currently in this age finding their roles and position in the society and especially single children who have a limited social environment, as revealed in the findings of the study, they do form a special bond with the parents, especially with their mothers. The mothers act in many roles for them, one of which is being a friend with whom they can share each and everything. With the given freedom and given their own personal space, mothers adopting authoritative parenting style, helps them in building and exploring their social environment and at the same time these mothers are expected to know more about their children's life than mothers adopting authoritarian parenting style.

Through this research, it can be recommended that though every parent has their own perception of having a particular way of raising their own children, but it is very important to know about what a child is feeling and what is necessary for their positive and a healthy growth. Therefore, parents can be recommended to adopt authoritative parenting style. They can spend time with their child, can talk to them about how their day was or if there is something that is bothering them. Rather than being a parent they can try being their friend for a day, try to understand the world from their point of view. They can try to give reasons for their denial for a particular thing. This way both the parents and the child can understand each other properly.

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### Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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***How to cite this article:*** Sikri R. (2021). Perception of Authoritative Mothers About Their Single Children's Social Adjustment in The Environment. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(3), 1232-1240. DIP:18.01.115.20210903, DOI:10.25215/0903.115