

## Parenting Styles as Predictor of Anxiety levels among Youth

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### ABSTRACT

Anxiety is an emotion that, in some ways, predates the evolution of man. Its widespread existence in humans, as well as its role in a variety of anxiety disorders, makes it an essential clinical focus. The present study aims at examining the role of maternal parenting styles on the prediction of anxiety levels among youth. Beck's Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) were used to collect data from the participants. The youth in the sample (N=60) ranged in age from 15 to 24 years old. ANOVA was applied to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that perceived parenting styles is a measuring factor that can predict anxiety among youth. Youth with a reported authoritative parenting style had low anxiety levels, whereas those with a perceived authoritarian parenting style had high anxiety levels. The results have been discussed in the light of operational definition of the variables. Suggestions for future research are offered.

**Keywords:** Parenting styles, Anxiety, Youth.

**P**arenthood enables an individual to reflect the essence of family, though every member of the family plays a role in shaping a child into the person he or she is today. This is a perpetual process, though its foundation gets laid during early months of pregnancy. A research has found that maternal emotions have small but significant effect on the infant behavior (Bergh, 1990).

In a family, usually parents are the two most important people that lead the way to child's typical development. They play a crucial role in the social and emotional development of children. Indeed, both indirect and direct processes of emotional socialization may shape the child's experience of emotion (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998)

Parents are often compared to the child's first companions. The communication, upbringing, lifestyles, etc. have its own role in shaping all domains of the child. What child perceives, also has an impact on his/her development. It was found that perceived parental warmth was positively associated with active coping and negatively correlated with trait anxiety in the adolescents (Wolfradt et al., 2003).

Anxiety disorders are quite common in children and adolescents, and they are associated with severe deficits in a variety of functional domains. Anxiety disorders in young people

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are still under diagnosed and undertreated, despite significant advances in knowledge and understanding. Recent studies have revealed the prevalence of anxiety problems among young people (Bertie et al., 2020).

Findings indicate that 15.9% to 61.9% of children identified as anxious or depressed have comorbid anxiety and depressive disorders and that measure of anxiety and depression is highly correlated (Brady et al., 1992). Research since 1992 indicates that comorbidity varies depending on the specific anxiety disorder (Cummings et al., 2014).

Anxiety development theories propose that parental acceptance, regulation, and modelling of anxious behaviors are linked to children's manifestation of anxiety. Research conducted with adult samples suggests that anxiety sensitivity is positively related to depression (Otto et al., 1995). A child's perception of parenting style may differ from the actual parenting style used by his or her primary caregivers. Similarly a study has shown that parents' perceptions and predictions about their own child's anxiety could have poor correspondence (Engel et al., 1994).

Many such researches have been conducted to understand the influence of perceived parenting styles on adolescents' behaviors [(Buschgens et al(2009), Ong et al. (2017), Mckinney & Kwan (2018)]. This study differs from much of the existing literature in that the youths themselves are the reporters of their own Anxiety levels and perceived parenting styles.

Parenting style is the standard procedure or approach that is employed by parents to support and maintain the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. According to the American Psychological Association, parenting practices around the world share three major goals: ensuring children's health and safety, preparing children for life as productive adults, and transmitting cultural values (APA, 2018).

According to Maccoby & Martin (1983) parenting behaviors were organized into four distinct parenting styles: authoritarian, permissive, uninvolved, and authoritative. These four parenting styles were based on two parental dimensions: parental warmth and parental control. This study focuses on parenting styles as described by Baumrind. Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1989, and 1991) proposed three qualitatively different patterns of parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritativeness and permissiveness. These styles of parenting are based on levels of demandingness and responsiveness used by the parents in rearing the child.

The authoritarian parent attempts to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set of standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority (Baumrind, 1991, p-890). Research has also found that a child's early experience with excessive parental control tends to correlate with the development of anxiety (Chorpita & Barlow, 1998). Research has also found that authoritarian attitudes practiced by mothers could significantly be responsible for the development of conduct problems in children (Thompson et al., 2003). For the ease of understanding, many would conclude that this style of parenting was practiced by Harry Potter's stern uncle and aunt. Children reared in environment of authoritarian approach of parenting tend to be more discontented, withdrawn and distrustful (Bhargava and Arora, 2001)

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The authoritative parent is demanding as well as responsive. They attempt to direct the child's activities in a rational, issue-oriented manner (Baumrind, 1991). Their children tend to be assertive, able to regulate themselves, socially responsible, and respectful to adults (Baumrind, 1991). Research has shown that authoritative parenting may be the most effective style, however, it also gravitates to be the most demanding in terms of parental energy and time (Greenberger & Goldberg, 1989). It has also been proposed that authoritative parenting style gives rise to positive direct effect on child's perspective taking followed by a positive effect on child's self-esteem (Yeung et al., 2016). Children who have authoritative parenting styles are more content, competent and successful (Baumrind, 1991).

Permissive parenting, often known as indulgent parenting, is used by parents who are supportive but not demanding. This method is used by parents who are lenient, do not expect their children to follow rules or boundaries, and avoid confrontation. He or she behaves more like a friend than a parent, with few rules, low expectations, and no advice or direction (Baumrind, 1991). Parents using this parenting style tend to be very caring and nurturing, but they also let their children handle difficulties without their help (Baumrind, 1991). Because permissive parents are less demanding, controlling children's conduct and establishing boundaries in their environments becomes considerably more challenging (Baumrind & Black, 1967). The children of such parenting style tend to be suffering from perceived stress and poorer mental health (Barton & Hirsch, 2015) and poor emotional intelligence (Wischerth, Mulvaney, Brackett, & Perkins, 2016).

### ***Perceived parenting styles (in Indian context)***

Cultural setting has an impact on family interactions and parent-child interaction (Triandis 2001). As a result, child rearing practices varied depending on the culture, Baumrind (1972) indicated in one of her early writings on parenting styles that if parenting action is congruent with culture norms, children will accept it. Anxiety disorder was linked to the father's permissiveness and the mother's authoritarianism, as well as the child's sociability. 69 percent of the differences in child anxiety disorders were explained by a mix of parenting approaches and kid temperament. Parental personality, child temperament, and parenting style all had substantial correlations. Perceived parenting style is perception of parenting style either from the child's viewpoint or parent's viewpoint. In the present study, child's viewpoint is taken into consideration to derive the results.

### ***Operational Definitions***

**Youth:** Youth is the stage of stress and storm. It is the term used to convey early stages of an individual's life. It also refers to young people who have not yet reached to adulthood. Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. That's why, as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. World Health Organization defines 'Youth' as the 15-24 year age group. While 'Young People' covers the age range 10-24 years.

**Anxiety:** According to APA, Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness or a rapid heartbeat.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Aim**

To study the parenting styles of mother as predictors of anxiety levels among youth.

### **Hypotheses**

- The anxiety levels among youth will vary due to different parenting styles.
- There would be a significant difference in anxiety levels among youth due to different parenting styles of mothers.
- There will be high level of anxiety among youth having Authoritarian parenting style.
- There will be low level of anxiety among youth having Permissive parenting style.

### **Sample And Sampling Technique**

A total sample of 60 male and female youths was selected through purposive sampling technique from private schools and colleges of district Haridwar in Uttarakhand. The age group ranged from 15-24 years. The number of subjects in each parenting style was 20.

### **Variables**

**Independent variable:** Perceived parenting style.

**Dependent variable:** Level of anxiety.

### **Tools**

- **Beck's Anxiety Inventory:** Beck's Anxiety Inventory (BAI) was created by Aaron T. Beck and has 21 items with a Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3 and raw scores ranging from 0 to 63. This scale is a self-report measure of severity and presence of anxiety in children as well as adults. The Beck's Anxiety Inventory is one of the few scales that eradicate the overlap depression and anxiety features completely.
- **Parental Authority Questionnaire:** Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) was created by Buri in 1991. It has 30 items in it that are designed to determine the parents' disciplinary practices perceived by their adult children. PAQ has three subscales namely permissive, authoritative and authoritarian. Each subscale has 10 items for which the scoring goes from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree through five stages (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Highest score in a category is 50. A high score on the subscale reveals the parent's inclined approach toward that particular parenting method.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Keeping in view the nature of data, inferential statistics ANOVA has been applied. Apart from the above, descriptive statistics has also been worked out. For measure of Central Tendency, mean has been processed and for measure of variability, standard deviation has been processed.

### **Procedure Of Data Collection**

The two tools, BAI and PAQ, were distributed through various social media platforms in the form of Google forms. Before the links to these two forms were delivered, a formal guideline was sent in which subjects were humbly asked to complete the questionnaires all at once. To ensure that the collected data could be included in the study, subjects were also requested to fill both the forms. For PAQ, according to the scores, subjects were assigned to the related category of perceived parenting style. For BAI, the sum of the obtained scores guided us to place them under the relevant category. The obtained data was then processed statistically.

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### RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

**Table 1: Analysis of variance on the anxiety scores of subjects**

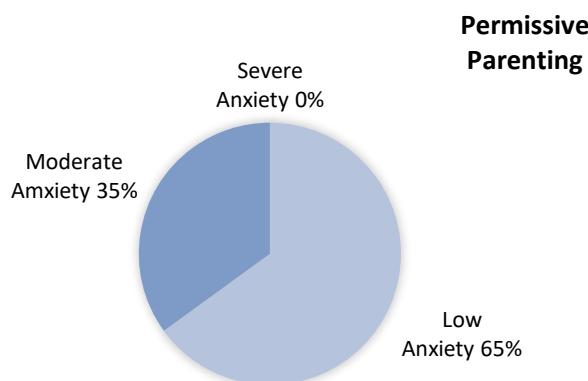
Source	Sum of Scores	df	Mean Square Variance	F
Treatment	2514.1	2	1257.05	14.633**
Error	4896.5	57	85.90	
Total	7410.6	59		

\*\*significant at .01 level

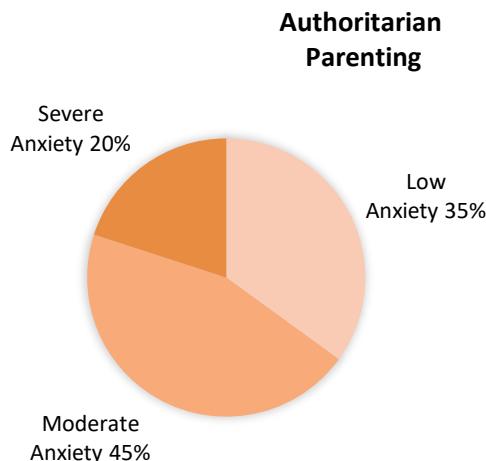
**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of anxiety scores of subjects perceiving different parenting styles**

	Permissive (N=20)	Authoritarian (N=20)	Authoritative (N=20)
Mean	17.95	25.5	9.65
SD	9.89	9.83	7.07

Results in Table -1 revealed that the anxiety levels among youth perceiving different parenting styles vary significantly. Results in Table -2 revealed that youths perceiving their parenting style as authoritarian scored the highest anxiety (Mean=25.5, SD=9.83). Whereas youths perceiving the parenting style of their mothers as authoritative scored the lowest anxiety (Mean=9.65, SD=7.07)

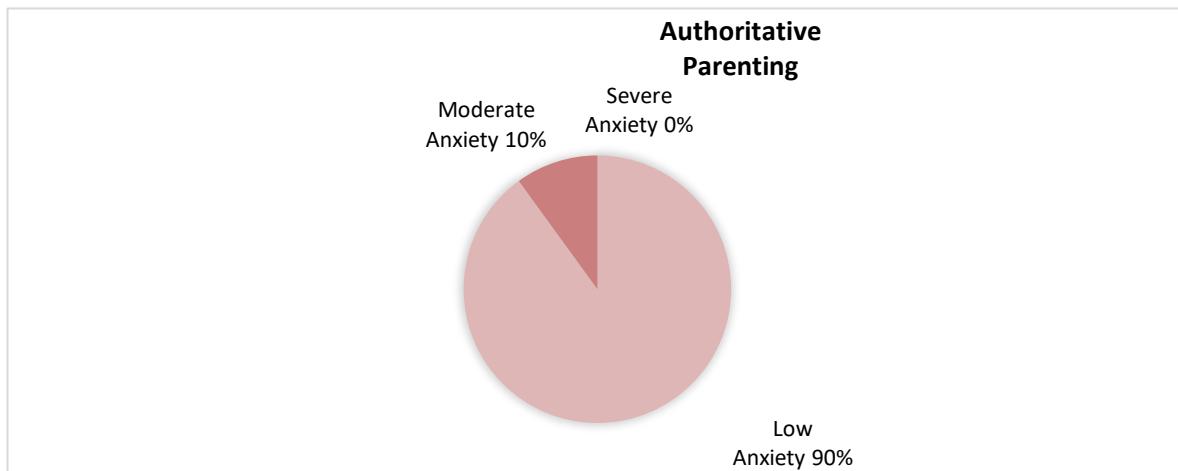


**Figure 1: Levels of Anxiety among Youth with perceived Permissive Parenting Style in terms of percentages.**

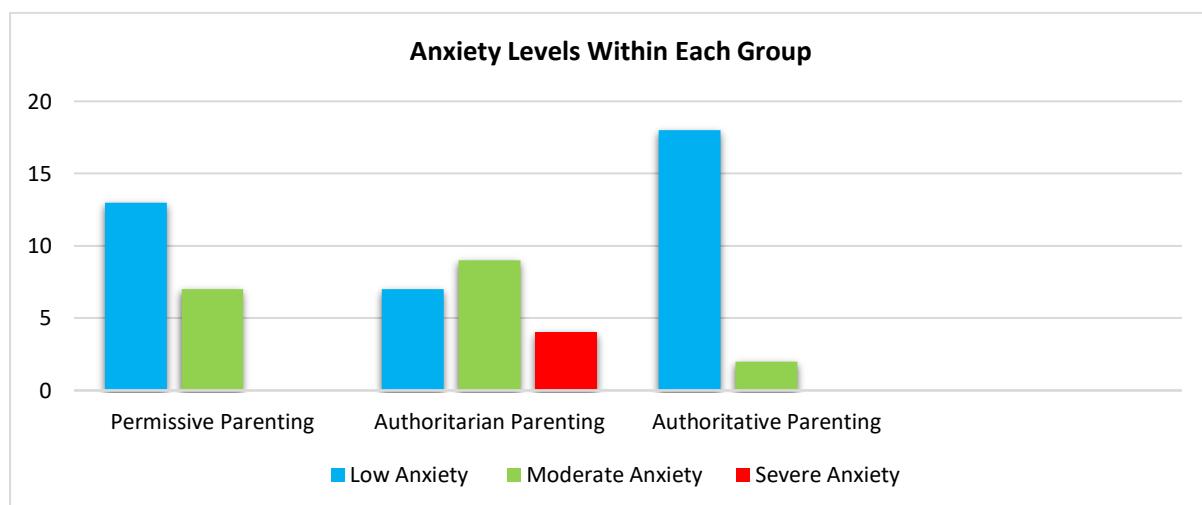


**Figure 2: Levels of Anxiety among Youth with perceived Authoritarian Parenting Style in terms of percentages.**

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**Figure 3: Levels of Anxiety among Youth with perceived Authoritative Parenting Style in terms of percentages.**



**Figure 4: Anxiety levels among Youth perceiving three different parenting styles.**

## DISCUSSION

Children look up to their parents as significant role models. What parents do and say now and, in the future, influences the child's behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. The results of the study seem to be reflecting that anxiety among youth in Indian population could be predicted with the help of the parenting style perceived by them.

The degree to which the youngster avoids frightening circumstances is one of the primary determinants in the maintenance of anxiety disorders. Findings support that children's perception of parenting behavior is associated with anxiety (Wei & Kendall 2014). Parenting behaviors that accommodate or strengthen avoidant techniques, such as overprotection, are likely to have an impact on the maintenance and development of anxiety disorders (Hudson & Rapee, 2004).

Overprotective and over-involved parenting is likely to limit the child's opportunities to confront new and potentially frightening events. It is hypothesized that by limiting these possibilities, the kid will be less able to habituate to the perceived threat in these situations, less able to learn to reliably detect threat in new situations, and less likely to learn they can

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cope with it. Critical parenting is another parenting style that has attracted attention in relation to the development of emotional health disorders. It is shown in the studies of Wood et al. (2003) and McLeod et al. (2007) that critical parenting has been linked to depression and, to a lesser extent, anxiety in children. Thus, it can be suggested that parents who criticize and minimize their children's feelings weaken their emotional regulation and make them more vulnerable to emotional health issues like anxiety and depression.

One of the goals of this study was to look into the degrees of anxiety experienced by children as a result of their mothers' parenting styles. In light of the findings in table 1, it is clear that a mother's perceived parenting style can predict the amount of anxiety in her children, which varies significantly among the three forms of parenting. A similar study conducted by Adubale (2017) in Nigeria, revealed that parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive) significantly predict anxiety in adolescent secondary school students.

In the figure 1, 35% youth have moderate anxiety levels and 65% youth have low anxiety levels. This study reveals that a huge number of youths have low anxiety levels with perceived permissive parenting style. Permissive parents behave more like a friend than a parental figure and that leads to reinforcement of the sense of freedom in children. This freedom from high demands, rules and restrictions, is the form of love they receive from their parents. A study showed that children with perceived parenting style as permissive are active in problem coping (Wolfradt, 2003). Thus, the fear of uncertainty and confrontation of uncontrollable situations in these children is nonchalantly endured by them.

In the figure 2, 20% youth have severe anxiety levels and 35% youth have low anxiety levels. The rest 45% have moderate anxiety levels. The strict parenting style places high expectations on children with less responsiveness. When parents place a premium on obedience, discipline, and control, the child's sense of nurture suffers. As this study reveals, quite a proportion of youth suffers from anxiety issues which either falls under moderate levels or high levels. This finding is supported by the study of Wolfradt (2003) that shows high anxiety scores on groups having authoritarian parenting styles.

In the figure 3, 90% youth have low anxiety levels and only 10% youth have moderate anxiety levels. These parents are warm, empathetic and kind. They reflect high demandingness and high responsiveness. These parents are less controlling, allowing the child to experience more emotions and make their own decisions based on their own reasons. Along with the perceived permissive parenting style, the study by Wolfradt (2003) showed that children with perceived parenting style as authoritative are active in problem coping.

Though we hypothesized that youth with perceived permissive parenting style will have the low anxiety levels, we discovered in this study that youth with perceived authoritative parenting styles had lower anxiety levels than the rest. The explanation could be because under permissive parenting, parents do not set or enforce any form of rules or guidelines, which can cause children to struggle with decision making and problem solving, resulting to anxiety.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As per the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn from the study:

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- The anxiety levels of youth varied among the three perceived parenting styles of mother.
- A significant difference in anxiety levels among youth could be observed in this study.
- The anxiety levels were high among youth who perceive parenting styles of their mother as authoritarian.
- According to the results, anxiety levels were low among youth who perceive their mother's parenting style as authoritative.
- The number of youths having severe levels of anxiety was maximum in the authoritarian parenting style (20%) and none in the permissive parenting style (0%).
- The number of youths having low levels of anxiety was maximum in authoritative (90%) and minimum in authoritarian parenting style (35%).

### ***Limitations and Suggestions***

1. Due to different circumstances such as uncontrolled issues, time limits, and the lack of necessary resources, a number of things could not be included in the current research study. The sample size was limited, which may have made an impact on the outcome.
2. Since the sample size was limited to one district, a larger area should be picked, i.e. more districts, cities, and states.
3. Only perceived maternal parenting styles were included in this study as a factor in predicting anxiety levels. In order to obtain more reliable and valid results, future similar study should also use perceived paternal parenting style.
4. As only perceived parenting styles were taken into consideration in this study, it is suggested to take parenting styles as perceived by the youth as well as the one reported by the parents, correspondingly to ensure the validity of the data in the present study.
5. The impact of parenting style was studied on just one variable, i.e., anxiety. Hence, it is suggested that apart from anxiety other related psychological variables may also be studied in order to see the impact of parenting styles.
6. The sample in the present study was limited to the youth. A future similar study can also be conducted on the sample other than youth.

### ***Implications***

The findings of the current study highlight the significance of parenting styles' impact on youth anxiety levels. It is concerning to learn that parenting methods have an impact on the psychological health of children. This highlights the importance of addressing parenting concerns in order to deal with youth anxiety. It also discusses the optimal parenting approaches for greater mental health (reduced anxiety) in children. The study data provides a solid foundation for addressing any issue with certainty and producing suggestions in that direction. The current study's research findings will be useful for agencies that interact with parents, such as schools, intervention centres, and colleges, as well as for parents directly and indirectly in guiding and understanding the function and value of suitable parenting style. The current study also points to the need of identifying and addressing anxiety concerns in young people. It also paves the way for further similar studies.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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