Research Paper

Maternal Perspectives on Parenting Adolescents: Insights from Kerala – India

Valsamma Chacko[1]*, Elizabeth Thomas[2], Jasmine Joseph[3]

ABSTRACT

This study explores various perspectives and challenges faced by mothers while parenting adolescents in Kerala, India. Parenting in the context of raising adolescents presents a myriad of challenges for mothers, shaping their unique experiences in the family dynamics. Using thematic analysis, the study focuses on 10 mothers, exploring their lived experiences through in-depth interviews. The participants consist of mothers with lower levels of education, engaged mostly in low-level occupations or unemployed in families with two to six children. The study reveals that mothers face diverse challenges in parenting and need to be conscious of their role as psychologically demanding. These challenges encompass family dynamics, intrapersonal struggles and socio-economic factors. The study also reveals positive emotions experienced by the mothers. The implications of this study are that mothers' parenting skills can be modified to improve the quality of care they provide, and the effects of parent-child relationships. The paper concludes that addressing these challenges can lead to smoother mother-adolescent relationships and better outcomes for the whole family.

***Keywords:** Parenting Adolescents, Mothers, Family Dynamics, Kerala, India*

T his study explores the perspectives of mothers regarding their parenting experiences with adolescents in Kerala, India. Parenting in the context of raising adolescents presents myriad challenges for mothers, shaping their unique experiences in the family dynamic. This qualitative research aims to delve into the multifaceted aspects of motherhood, focusing on the trials and tribulations faced by mothers as they navigate this critical phase. The participants are mothers with lower levels of education, often engaged in low-level occupations or unemployed in families consisting of two to six children. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of mothers, with implications for supporting and empowering them in their parenting journey. The primary objective is to explore and understand the firsthand experiences of mothers as they navigate the process of parenting and caring for their adolescents.

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Christ University, Bangalore, India
[2]Associate Professor Department of Psychology, Christ University, Bangalore, India
[3]Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Christ University, Bangalore, India
*Corresponding Author

Parenting Through a Feminist Lens

This study explores the concept of parenting through a feminist lens, delving into the transformative potential of a gender-conscious approach to caregiving (Ruddick, 1990). Applying a feminist framework can offer valuable insights into the complex dynamics of caregiving and its broader societal implications. A feminist perspective encourages an exploration of the challenges and issues mothers face in parenting, particularly those rooted in patriarchal structures, gender disparities and the intersectionality of identities. It also prompts an investigation into potential deficits in mothers' parenting skills, acknowledging how gendered socialisation and unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities may contribute to these gaps. Additionally, the feminist framework empowers mothers to voice their unique experiences and perspectives, shedding light on their agency, strengths and resilience in navigating the complexities of parenting. Through this approach, the study can contribute to the promotion of more equitable and inclusive parenting practices, ultimately fostering an environment where mothers and adolescents thrive and challenge traditional gender norms.

Parenting Adolescents

Adolescence is a crucial period, marked by numerous challenges and obstacles (Kakkad et al., 2014), such as peer influence, bullying, substance use and abuse. To navigate through these challenges, adolescents require parental warmth, understanding and guidance. Parents also need to update and refine their skills to effectively connect with their adolescents and support them during this transitional phase (Beelmann et al., 2023; Kallarakal & Gonsalvez, 2021). Understanding these dynamics can facilitate better communication and support among parents and their adolescent children (Nair et al., 2013). Research in developmental psychology has demonstrated that parent-child relationships vary throughout life's courses, partly in response to children's evolving developmental needs (Bush & Peterson, 2013). Adolescence is notably challenging for both parents and children (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2020; Smith & Forehand, 1986). Parents experience the lowest level of happiness in their relationships with their teenage children (Meier et al., 2018).

As per Laursen, Coy and Collins, early adolescence (10-15 years) is marked by increased levels of conflict with parents (Laursen et al., 1998). Deković emphasised that the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship plays a significant role in shaping adolescent antisocial behavior. Koh and Rueter discovered that a negative quality of relationships between adolescents and their parents is associated with higher levels of externalising problems (Koh & Rueter, 2011), which may include behaviours, such as disturbing others, engaging in verbal and physical aggression and displaying acts of violence (Aswathy et al., 2015). This emphasises the critical role that positive parent-adolescent relationships play in fostering healthier behavioural outcomes and reducing the likelihood of engaging in disruptive or aggressive behaviour. Parental attitudes and approaches play a pivotal role in shaping both the behavioural problems and character development of children (Yap & Jorm, 2015).

Parenting involves a continuous commitment to being attentive and responsive to the developmental needs of children in accordance with their respective ages. Mothers are advised to adopt persistent and targeted adjustments in their parenting practices, aligning with the developmental changes experienced by their children (Branje, 2018).

Studies reveal that while raising adolescents, mothers encounter additional responsibilities within the context of their familial obligations (Kohli et al., 2023). Most of the mothers embrace the additional responsibilities that accompany family life, demonstrating a strong

commitment to their households and finding joy in fulfilling these roles. However, it is important to note that a few mothers may not share the same level of enthusiasm for these added duties (Mudiam et al., 2023). For this subset of mothers, the challenges associated with child-rearing can lead to a sense of burden, making their lives more challenging and demanding (Mudiam et al., 2023).

Mother-Adolescent Interactions and Parenting Skills

Additionally, mothers tend to perceive less meaning in their interactions with adolescents and report higher levels of stress when compared to their experiences with school-going children (Meier et al., 2018). Mothers engage in more frequent and intimate interactions with their children compared to fathers (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2013). Studies from Kerala have proven that adolescents are more securely attached to mothers than fathers (Natarajan, 2013). They are often perceived to be approachable by their children (Yuan, 2023). Additionally, mothers seem to possess an innate ability to sense and understand the needs of their adolescents (McKenna et al., 2022). The increasing workload of mothers appears to diminish the level of care and attention given to children, particularly adolescents, who require close monitoring and guidance during this crucial developmental phase. The absence of adequate parenting skills in mothers contributes to delinquent behaviour in children (Mwangangi, 2019). The relationship between mothers' parenting and adolescents' outcomes is influenced by two dimensions of psychological empowerment, which are intrapersonal and interactional (Vijayalakshmi & Lin, 2023).

Socio-cultural Context of Participants

The evolution of the family life cycle brings about a notable shift in mothers' roles, particularly during their children's adolescence. The accompanying demands of child-rearing during this period can create significant stress for certain mothers, ultimately leading to frustration in their lives (Lilius, 2020; Mudiam et al., 2023). Kerala in South India has a unique, cultural context and limited research in this area makes it important for us to study these specific groups of mothers. Despite its global recognition for achieving the highest literacy rate (94%) among Indian states and the highest women's literacy rate in Asia (92%), according to the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India (ORGI, 2011), Kerala faces several internal challenges. Certain developmental outcomes and advancements in the state can contribute to conflict and stress within families (Singh et al., 2019). Changes in family structures and transitioning from joint to nuclear families, have impacted their lives (Pillai et al., 2022). Parental pressure on children to achieve academic excellence often leads to a counterproductive outcome (Grolnick, 2002). Additionally, the prevalent substance use and abuse among youth and adolescents are posing significant challenges to parenting practices (Joshua et al., 2021).

Researcher's Perspective

Drawing from the researcher's extensive experience in counselling over the past 20 years, a noteworthy observation has been made regarding the progressive widening of gaps in parent-child relationships in her geographical area of practice. Mothers have expressed their struggles and frustrations in effectively managing their relationships with adolescents. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that certain context-specific factors may contribute to the burdensome nature of parenting. Despite the critical role mothers play in the lives of their adolescents, there is limited research that comprehensively investigates the multifaceted aspects of their parenting journeys, especially for the cultural nooks in the northern parts of Kerala. Given all the above factors, there is a need to include and report the perspectives of mothers in the upbringing of their children. Therefore, the study population

consists of mothers of adolescents in Kerala, chosen with the objective of comprehending the challenges they encounter in their parenting. The present research serves as a preliminary investigation aimed at developing an intervention programme for mothers in the region, with a focus on enhancing parenting skills for adolescents.

Objectives of the Study
1. To explore the parenting experiences of mothers in relation to raising their adolescent children.
2. To investigate the challenges and issues that mothers encounter in parenting.
3. To identify the deficits in mothers' parenting skills.

Implications of the study
Though previous research has shown that parents often drop out of training programmes easily (Friars & Mellor, 2009), it is essential to bridge the information gap and offer resources that cater to the specific needs and cultural contexts of these mothers, thereby supporting them in their parenting journeys (Kallarakal & Gonsalvez, 2021). The current study can provide valuable insights into the dynamics and complexities of this crucial phase of child rearing. This understanding can assist in tailoring interventions that address specific challenges and promote positive parent-child relationships. The study highlights deficits in mothers' parenting skills that require improvement and training.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
To gain a comprehensive understanding of mothers' perspectives and experiences, this study utilised the qualitative research design of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The current study is the preliminary one for a larger study to design parenting skills workshop for mothers of adolescents in Kerala. The study focuses on their personal life experiences while raising adolescents, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of their journey. The qualitative study design is selected to offer detailed and profound insights into the complex facets of mothers' experiences, while raising their adolescent children.

Sample
According to Creswell and Miller, a sample size of 10 can provide sufficient information for the study, depending on the context. The appropriateness of the sample size depends on the research objectives, the complexity of the research questions and the depth of information needed to achieve the study's goals (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In certain qualitative research designs, a smaller sample size can still yield rich and meaningful insights, especially when the focus is on in-depth exploration and understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

The Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ) was administered to a sample of 200 mothers with children aged 14 to 17, who were attending higher secondary classes in government schools in both rural and suburban areas of Calicut district, Kerala. It is reported that mothers from these areas may have fewer opportunities to participate in parenting training programmes (Khambhaita, 2014). A select 24 mothers were contacted, based on their poor scores in APQ to give their consent for the in-depth interview. Mothers with mental illnesses and adopted children were excluded. The final 10 mothers interviewed were aged 32 to 50 years and were native residents of Kerala.

Data Collection

The researcher interviewed the women over eight months. Participants provided written, informed consent after a thorough explanation of the research process, ensuring their voluntary and informed participation. Additionally, consent to record the interviews was also requested from the participants. They were provided with texts in their native language (Malayalam), which informed them about various aspects of the study.

The researcher created a semi-structured interview schedule, consisting of eight questions. As a professional counsellor with 20 years of experience, the researcher personally crafted the interview schedule. It involved asking multiple questions, each with sub-questions. Probes were used to further explore specific details of the issues. The interview schedule underwent validation by two psychologists working on parenting, to ensure its accuracy and reliability. The recommended changes that were deemed appropriate were subsequently incorporated into the final version.

The researcher conducted each interview individually, in a private, quiet room at the participant's home to maintain privacy and avoid interruptions. Only one participant was interviewed at a time. On an average, the interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes each. The point of saturation was reached after conducting 10 interviews. All personal and sensitive information was stored in password-protected computer files to ensure data security and confidentiality. The researcher disclosed her position as a professional counsellor from the same socio-demographic region to the participants. No compensation or honorarium was provided to the participants for their involvement.

The audio recordings were transcribed and translated into English. To ensure the consistency and reliability of the data, an inquiry audit was conducted by two external individuals. Additionally, a member check was performed with five mothers over the telephone. The post-interview comment sheet served as a valuable tool for the researcher to record the emotions expressed by the informants after the interviews. Reflexive journaling throughout the research process helped to promote self-awareness and address the biases of the researcher.

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted thematic analysis of the data manually, adhering to the method outlined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six-stage procedure aimed to enhance the accuracy and consistency of the themes. Finally, the researcher produced the report, presenting the findings and interpretations of the thematic analysis.

RESULTS

The in-depth interview data analysis resulted in the identification of five main themes and their corresponding sub-themes. Table 1 below shows the demographic data of the participants and their adolescent children.

Table 1 Demographic data of the mothers

Sl.no	Age	Religion	Occupation	Education	Details of Children
1	41	Hindu	Daily wager	12th	3, 1st son (15)
2	35	Muslim	Home maker	8th	1, daughter (15)
3	38	Muslim	Home maker	-0-	3, 2nd and 3rd twin sons (16)
4	35	Muslim	Home maker	12th	5, 1st son (15)
5	50	Hindu	Home maker	10th	6, 6th daughter (17)
6	44	Hindu	Home maker	12th	4, 2nd son (16), 3rd son (15)
7	32	Muslim	Home maker	10th	2, 1st son (14)
8	36	Hindu	Home maker	10th	2, daughters (16, 15)
9	39	Muslim	Home maker	11th	4, 2nd son (15), 3rd son (14)
10	40	Hindu	Daily wager	12th	3, 1st daughter (14)

Below are the presentations of lived experiences of participants arranged thematically. Our analysis reveals the challenges that mothers address in parenting and family dynamics, particularly the emotional facets of mother-child parenting relationships. While discussing their experiences, they also reveal their deficits in parenting skills for adolescents and strengthening factors in the mother-adolescent bond. Table 2 gives the list of four identified, organising themes of the study.

Table 2 Thematic Analysis of the Study

Sl.No	Organising Themes	Sub Themes
1	Challenges in Parenting and Family Dynamics	1. Parents differ in the way they parent 2. Multifaceted responsibilities of mothers 3. Unable to meet the demands of children 4. Inability to enforce discipline and command respect from children 5. Struggles to cope with stress in family life 6. Lack of support from extended families
2	Emotional Dynamics in Mother-Child Parenting Relationships	1. Emotional triggers of the mothers while parenting 2. Mothers with poor coping skills, vulnerable to sadness and depression 3. Reactions of adolescent children to mothers' emotional reactivity 4. Positive emotions experienced by Mothers 5. Responses of adolescent children to positive parenting
3	Deficits in Mother's Parenting Skills for Adolescents	1. Managing emotional reactivity of mothers while parenting 2. Improving mothers' personal skills of parenting 3. Enhancing mothers' knowledge in raising an adolescent 4. Learning to connect with adolescent children

Sl.No	Organising Themes	Sub Themes
4	Strengthening the Mother-Adolescent Bond	1. Mothers spending time with children
		2. Mothers' understanding of the needs of the growing child
		3. Open discussions in the family about children's issues
		4. Lack of clear-cut structure, hierarchy and rules in the family

The above themes are discussed in detail and verbatim from the participants given in the supplementary materials, which further strengthen the findings. The four organising themes that emerged have been discussed in greater detail below at identified sub-theme levels. These illustrate how women navigate through their lives as parents for adolescents.

Challenges in Parenting and Family Dynamics
Mothers face a multitude of challenges in their parenting journey, including but not limited to: balancing family and work responsibilities, dealing with financial pressures, managing the emotional and behavioral needs of their children, coping with stress and fatigue, and seeking support in the absence of extended family assistance. These challenges can vary in intensity and complexity, making each mother's experience unique.

Parents differ in the way they parent
Parents exhibit variations in their parenting styles and approaches, resulting in differences in the way they raise and care for their children. Mothers reveal that husbands foster different approaches in giving guidance to children, which contradicts that of mothers. Some of them face blame from husbands, attributing the behaviour of children to be in response to mothers' parenting.

> "When I complain to my husband about children's misbehavior, he says that they are troublesome because I irritate them by saying this and that" (Mother-180)
> "You only brought them up like this, now bear it" (Mother-94)

Parents often exhibit variations in their methods of raising and caring for their children, with husbands fostering different approaches in giving guidance that may contradict that of mothers. This disparity in parenting styles can create mixed messages for children, as they navigate the expectations and boundaries set by both parents.

> "They might come to me seeking permission for something and I would say yes, but then later find out that my husband has a different opinion on the matter. This can be frustrating for them and I understand why." (Mother-107)

Multifaceted responsibilities of mothers
Mothers often find themselves taking on multiple responsibilities, assuming various roles within the family and beyond. These roles may include caring for their children, managing household duties, fulfilling work or career commitments and tending to the needs of other family members. The simultaneous undertaking of these responsibilities can be empowering in some cases but can also be demanding and impact a mother's well-being and time management. In situations where fathers are absent, away for work or not fulfilling their parenting responsibilities, mothers take on the role of both parents, assuming the responsibilities typically associated with fathers.

> "I have to care for everyone at home. I go to the Corporation, the village, and for everything, even to the hospital. All these are my obligations. I feel proud that I can do such things". (Mother-207)

> "Care of children, financial affairs, in short the whole family is run by me. I need to do everything for them - I only am doing it" (Mother- 94)

Women in Kerala often find themselves in the position of caring for sick and elderly parents, taking on the responsibility of providing care and support for their aging family members. Six out of ten mothers have either sick or elderly members to be cared for, requiring personal attention and bedside care. Two of them have their own mothers too, who are sick and elderly.

> "I have to care for my mother-in-law who is sickly. I have my own mother who is old and needs care. I have that duty too" (Mother-107)

Mothers often experience a sense of feeling overburdened with numerous responsibilities and tasks. All the participants emphasise that they are overly strained physically and mentally. Mothers expect that family members should share the work, especially to help working mothers. Conflict occurs when children do not help mothers at home.

> "When I ask my daughters to do some work at home, they are not so interested in it. The elder one wants the younger one to start the work first" (Mother-94)

Unable to meet the demands of children
Some parents may struggle to meet the demands of their children, facing challenges in fulfilling their needs and expectations. Children want unlimited time with friends out in the evenings and prefer not to inform their parents about their whereabouts. Mothers find it hard to manage the adolescents in these matters and other issues on studies, housework and the use of social media.

> "It is a big responsibility to care for children who are grown up. I get so angry when friends come and call her to go out. She will tell me that I am doubting her all the time." (Mother-115)

In some households, mothers may have a source of income, but they often face the challenge of managing the expectations and demands of their children, which surpass their financial means. Consequently, they may find themselves grappling with the dilemma of how to fulfil their children's aspirations while maintaining a stable and sustainable financial situation. This complex issue underscores the importance of financial education, responsible budgeting and better understanding of financial limitations within families.

> "I work hard to provide for my family, and I want the best for my children. But sometimes, they ask for things that I simply can't buy for them. I cannot buy a phone that costs as much as my one-month salary. My children do not understand". (Mother-118)
>
> "My Son wants to be a pilot, but I cannot afford to send him for those studies. Sometimes he says he wants to be an AI engineer, but I do not even know what that is." (Mother-142)

Inability to enforce discipline and command respect from children
Some parents may find it challenging to enforce discipline and command respect from their children, experiencing difficulties in maintaining authority within the family dynamic. Except two, all mothers said that they have problems in enforcing discipline, which in turn escalates to fights in the family.

> "When I instruct her, she would say, 'Ah! Started'. When I tell them to study, she would say: 'Umma (mother), do not tell us to study, I know how to study'" (Mother-115)

Commanding respect from children is an essential aspect of effective parenting. When children respect their parents, it fosters a positive and harmonious family dynamic and lays the foundation for strong relationships built on trust and mutual understanding. However, many women are not able to achieve this in their homes.

> "I have to listen to things like: 'Why don't you leave my room? Give me privacy!'" (Mother-118)
>
> "Things like: 'What can you do if I don't study, you show me how to study then.' I don't know how to handle this." (Mother- 94)

Struggles to cope with stress in family life

Many mothers encounter struggles while coping with stress in their family lives, as they navigate the various responsibilities and challenges that accompany parenting and maintain a family unit. Several mothers said that they are stressed out and that there is no one to ventilate to, no one to understand them or to give appreciation.

> "I do not share my sorrows with anyone. I suffer silently and let go. I will not share my sorrows with anyone, even with my husband." (Mother-118)

Participants also reported that they have no knowledge of how to handle their adolescents and do not know where to seek support.

> "Where should we go and learn? What I try to do is taken from the articles in magazines and newspapers" (Mother-115)

Lack of support from extended families

Some parents may experience a lack of support from extended family members, which can add to the challenges of parenting and caring for their children. The absence of extended family support may further intensify the demands and responsibilities placed on parents. Mothers recalled that they worked single-handedly and hardly got help from extended families. In addition, more families are opting for or need to move to nuclear family structures.

> "I have no help from any in-laws, I do not share my sorrows with them and I suffer alone. My mother-in-law can help younger kids or take up some kitchen work, but she does not bother." (Mother-207).

Emotional Dynamics in Mother-Child Parenting Relationships

The emotional state of the mother can significantly impact children, as they often pick up from or are influenced by their mother's emotions and well-being. A mother's emotional state can affect the parent-child relationship, children's emotional development and their overall well-being.

Emotional triggers of the mothers while parenting

Various emotional triggers can affect mothers. These triggers may include frustration, guilt, stress and exhaustion when faced with challenging behaviour or demanding situations from their children. Additionally, worries about their children's well-being, future and academic performance can also be emotional triggers for them. Understanding these emotional triggers is essential in comprehending the complexities of motherhood and its impact on the parent-child relationships. All the mothers reported that in certain aspects, such as studies, help at home, use of social media and friendship, when children do not obey, they are triggered emotionally.

> "The biggest problem is that he goes around with his friends. Sometimes he does not come home in the evening. I get angry and I speak louder" (Mother-129)

Mothers with poor coping skills, vulnerable to sadness and depression
Mothers who struggle with poor coping mechanisms may be more susceptible to sadness and depression. The challenges of parenting, combined with inadequate coping strategies, can contribute to increased emotional vulnerability in mothers. Identifying and supporting them is crucial in promoting their well-being and mental health. Mothers desire that someone should understand their inner world and support them. The interviewed mothers said that as a cumulative effect, they feel sad and depressed.

> "I have no one to share my sorrows…, (cries). When I share my sorrows with my husband, he will not understand. However much work I do there is no gratitude, not even from his mother". (Sobs)…. (Mother-107)

Reactions of adolescent children to mothers' emotional reactivity
Adolescent children may react to their mothers' emotional reactivity in various ways. They might mirror their mother's emotions, becoming emotionally responsive or reactive themselves. Alternatively, some adolescents may withdraw or become distant when faced with their mother's emotional reactions. The dynamics between mothers' emotional expressions and their adolescent children's responses can significantly influence the parent-child relationship and emotional development during this critical phase of adolescence.

> "I tolerate a lot; should anything like yelling of that sort happen, he reacts badly. Sometimes I am forced against my will to shut my own mouth, so that conflict may not escalate. When I get angry, he also gets angry" (Mother-142)

Positive Emotions Experienced by the Mothers
Women often experience a range of positive emotions while parenting adolescents. These may include joy, love, pride and fulfillment while witnessing their children's achievements, growth and happiness. They can strengthen the bond between mothers and their children and contribute to overall parental satisfaction and well-being**.** Three of the mothers said that they experience the warmth and affection of their children. At a time when children feel safe with their mothers' interaction, they return it with sharing, intimacy and trust expressed through openness, confiding and extending help at home.
"When I speak with love, my daughter will be good" (Mother-143).

> "Very rarely, but sometimes, she comes to the kitchen and helps. We talk during that time. I like doing that with her. But it happens only a very few times" (Mother-115)

Responses of adolescent children to positive parenting
Adolescent children typically respond positively to positive parenting practices. When parents provide love, support, encouragement and consistent guidance, adolescents are more likely to feel secure, develop strong self-esteem and exhibit positive behaviour. Positive parenting fosters open communication and mutual respect, leading to healthier parent-child relationships and better outcomes for adolescents' emotional and social development. Two of the mothers reported that children like their mothers to be around them and get involved with them when they play. They esteem their mother. All they need is a safe, non-threatening environment between mother and child. This seems to be the core of the mother-child relationship.

> "My son said 'I like that mother is with us here, she is a help for everything'. When I deal with them nicely, they obey me" (Mother-129).
> "When I praise her, she is very nice to me, studies responsibly and all. Sometimes I take out time and sit with her and enquire about her day at school, then she talks about friends and we both feel good." (Mother-115)

Deficits in Mother's Parenting Skills for Adolescents

Some mothers may face deficits in knowledge and skills related to parenting. This could include a lack of understanding about child development, effective disciplining strategies, communication techniques, or handling challenging behaviour. Such deficits may lead to difficulties in providing appropriate care and guidance to their children, potentially impacting the parent-child relationship and the child's overall development. Addressing these knowledge and skill gaps through education and support can be beneficial in enhancing parenting abilities and family well-being.

Managing emotional reactivity of mothers while parenting

All mothers unanimously agreed that they do react emotionally. Nevertheless, they have realised that they need to be gentle and loving. Except two, all others said that they need to learn to deal with children. When mothers can regulate their emotions, they can respond to their children with empathy and understanding, fostering a healthier parent-child relationship.

> "I will get angry soon. I want to control it. I will cry soon. When I get angry, I speak louder. Sometimes I wonder if I could die. I become so helpless" (Mother-115).

Improving mothers' personal skills of parenting

Providing parenting education and workshops can enhance their understanding of child development, effective communication, and positive disciplinary strategies. Offering support groups and counselling can also help mothers address specific challenges they may encounter in their parenting journey. Empowering mothers with knowledge, resources and emotional support can lead to more confident and effective parenting, benefiting both mothers and their children. Mothers are conscious of their lack of personal skills, such as the inability to manage anger, lack of assertiveness and inability to make effective criticism. They perceive that disharmony between the mother and child could be due to ineffective or lack of personal skills.

> "Sometimes I think I need to change, because I always scold him, when I scold him, he gets angry and doesn't obey. I want to learn how to control my anger" (Mother-98)

Enhancing mothers' knowledge in raising an adolescent

Enhancing mothers' knowledge in raising an adolescent can be accomplished through targeted educational initiatives, through workshops, seminars, or parenting programmes tailored specifically to the challenges of parenting adolescents. They can provide valuable insights and practical strategies. These educational interventions can cover topics such as adolescent development, effective communication, setting boundaries, managing conflicts and promoting healthy relationships. None of the participating mothers could answer questions such as the specific problems of their adolescents and the social, emotional and intellectual changes in the adolescents. Probably due to this knowledge deficit, mothers fail to keep an understanding relationship with their children.

> "I know nothing about the problems adolescents face. Absolutely. I do not know anything about parenting." (Mother-115).

Learning to connect with adolescent children

Learning to connect with adolescent children requires active effort and open communication. Parents can foster a strong connection by actively listening to their children, being empathetic and respecting their perspectives. Spending quality time together, engaging in shared activities and showing genuine interest in their activities can also strengthen the parent-child bond. Most mothers explained that they do not spend quality time with their children. Mothers in general are not aware of different ways of spending time together. This may be

because they have not understood the importance of being with children and have not seen or heard of different ways of spending time with children.

> "No recreation, no time to go out, no TV here, husband says children have to study" (Mother-180).

Strengthening the Mother-Adolescent Bond

Strengthening the mother-adolescent bond is a vital aspect of parenting during the transformative adolescent years. Through consistent expectations and boundaries, mothers can create a nurturing and organised atmosphere that promotes respect and cooperation among family members. By investing time, understanding and giving them emotional support, mothers can nurture a resilient and trusting mother-adolescent bond that positively impacts the well-being and development of their children.

Mothers spending time with children

Mothers spending quality time with their children is a crucial factor in nurturing the mother-child relationship. It also provides opportunities for mothers to better understand their children's interests, feelings and needs, promoting healthy emotional development and a sense of security in the child-parent relationship. Only two mothers mentioned that they spend time with children. They are confident that their closeness facilitates the relationship between them.

> "I sing with them, I dance with them, we sit inside and talk together and enjoy sometimes. But that happens rarely." (Mother-207).

Mothers' understanding of the needs of the growing child

As children go through different developmental stages, mothers who are attuned to their changing needs can provide appropriate support, guidance and nurturance. This understanding enables mothers to adapt their parenting approach to meet the unique emotional, social and physical requirements of their children at every developmental milestone. For mothers, their needs are external matters, such as supplying food, clothes, or things children need at school. However, mothers do not know about their children's emotional, social, intellectual, physical and moral needs.

"She needs to improve her studies, needs study materials" (Mother-115)

> "I try to get him good food, good clothes, some of the things he asks for, that's all I can do. What else do they need." (Mother-118)

Open discussions in the family about children's issues

When family members engage in open and honest conversations about various topics, including children's challenges, feelings and experiences, it strengthens the family bonds and trust. Such discussions encourage children to express themselves freely, feel heard and seek guidance from their parents and other family members. This open dialogue fosters a sense of belonging and emotional security within the family, creating an atmosphere in which children can comfortably share their concerns and receive support. All the mothers, except one, stated that their adolescents do not open up to them. Hence, mothers are not aware of their children's problems. All the mothers desired that their children share their issues. Some of them were sorrowful at the self-centred attitude of their children.

> "He used to share everything earlier, but not so much at present, I am not sure whether he has anything more to share with us" (Mother-98)
>
> "I always doubt whether she is hiding something from me. Sometimes I ask, sometimes I scold directly. I am always scared for her safety, but she does not understand my concerns" (Mother-115)

Lack of clear-cut structure, hierarchy and rules in the family

When there is a lack of established guidelines and expectations, children may have difficulty in understanding boundaries and behavioural limits, which can result in inconsistent discipline and conflicts within the family. Having a clear structure and set of rules helps to provide children with a sense of security, predictability and understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Mothers have difficulties in relating to children because there is no common written family rule followed by all family members.

> "Whatever the father says they (children) obey. If he says not to do a thing they will obey. If I give my opinion, my husband will get angry. I have no freedom to express my opinion" (Mother-118).

DISCUSSION

This study explores the perspectives of mothers in norther Kerala, India, towards parenting adolescents, using thematic analysis. The results of the study reported the typical demographics and various experiences of mothers in the region. As observed in previous research, various areas were identified that could be further developed through skill-building trainings and workshops.

One of the objectives of the current study was to explore the experiences of mothers in raising their adolescent children, shedding light on the challenges and dynamics that shape this crucial phase of parenting. Mothers who participated in the study said they faced multifaceted challenges, including balancing work and family responsibilities, coping with stress, struggling to meet the evolving demands of their growing children and seeking support without extended family assistance (Lilius, 2020; Mudiam et al., 2023). The variations in parenting styles between mothers and fathers create mixed messages for children, impacting their understanding of boundaries and expectations. Positive emotions, such as joy and fulfillment, were also experienced by mothers during this phase. However, deficits in parenting skills and a lack of support from extended families added to the complexity of raising adolescents.

Mothers grapple with the daunting task of balancing family and work responsibilities while managing the emotional and behavioural needs of their children. Financial pressures and the inability to meet their children's demands contribute to stress and feelings of inadequacy. Enforcing discipline and commanding respect from their children can also pose significant challenges, further affecting the parent-child relationships. Additionally, mothers may lack adequate support and resources to cope with the emotional reactivity that accompanies parenting (Nair et al., 2013). Understanding these challenges and issues is crucial for providing targeted support and interventions to empower mothers and improve their parenting experiences.

The deficits in mother's parenting skills that may impact their ability to provide appropriate care and guidance to their children are highlighted as coping mechanisms, enforcing discipline and maintaining authority within the family dynamics, not understanding their adolescents' problems and needs, indicating a lack of knowledge and skills related to parenting during this phase (Aswathy et al., 2015). Addressing these deficits through education, support, and targeted interventions can be beneficial in enhancing mother's parenting abilities and ultimately improving their families' well-being (Kallarakal & Gonsalvez, 2021).

In conclusion, this study delves into the diverse and intricate experiences of mothers in Kerala, India, who are raising adolescent children. Viewed through the lens of a feminist perspective, it is a gender-conscious approach to caregiving benefits in the socio-cultural context (Natarajan, 2013). Based on the descriptive data of study participants, it is evident that a majority of the mothers in this region have lower levels of education and are either unemployed or engaged in low-level occupations, with more than two children in their families. It is undoubtedly possible to address deficits in mother's parenting skills for adolescents through targeted interventions (Beelmann et al., 2023). The current study's findings support previous research on the same population, indicating that empowerment training at both intrapersonal and interactional levels is crucial. Enhancing mothers' self-control, self-efficacy and confidence, while also fostering a sense of support, resources and social connections in their community, lead to improved outcomes for both mothers and their adolescent children (Vijayalakshmi & Lin, 2023). By focusing on specific areas, such as managing emotional reactivity while parenting, improving mothers' personal skills, enhancing their knowledge in raising adolescents, fostering methods to connect with adolescent children and effective training programmes can be developed to equip mothers with the necessary tools and strategies to navigate the challenges of parenting during this critical phase in their children's lives.

We hope to inform policymakers, educators and practitioners to foster a better understanding of the unique needs and support systems required for both mothers and their adolescent children. Future studies can delve into designing skill-building training programmes that are specifically tailored for mothers in regions culturally and socially similar to the current study's context. By considering the unique cultural norms, social dynamics and parenting practices of these specific regions, such targeted interventions can be developed to address the distinct challenges and needs faced by mothers in such communities.

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Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflicts or competing interests. All co-authors have seen and agreed with the contents of the manuscript. We certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.