

RESEARCH BRIEF

Adolescents' Emotional Abuse in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: The Role of Parenting Style

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Child maltreatment is a serious issue that is affecting the world, with uncountable cases of unreported or underreported incidents. For example, emotional neglect accounts for 184 cases per 1,000 people (Stoltenborgh, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Alink, & van IJzendoorn, 2015). It is also reported that the prevalence of child maltreatment is universal, affecting society in terms of economics and social development (Abbasi, Saeidi, Khademi, Hoseini, & Moghadam, 2015). In Malaysia, emotional abuse is not uncommon as well. Emotional abuse is considered different from physical and sexual abuse in the sense where the abuse, in some cases, occurs as unintentional as possible, even when it is harmful to the child. According to the Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia (2016), there were 106 emotionally abused children in Malaysia in the year 2016. Cheah and Choo (2016) added that one out of five children might suffer from teacher-inflicted emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse does not only affect the child at present but also the child's long-term development, extending until adolescence and even to adulthood (Riggs & Kaminski, 2010). In terms of psychopathology, the adverse outcomes of emotional abuse might result in psychological disorders such as bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, and borderline personality disorder (Gratz et al., 2011). Neurophysiological changes in stress response systems could also be impacted as a certain neurotransmitter, or hormonal pathways are altered due to emotional abuse (Carpenter et

al., 2009). Moreover, subjective distress, depressive symptoms, and feelings of hopelessness could appear on the emotionally abused child victims (Courtney, Kushwaha, & Johnson, 2008). Regarding interpersonal function, emotionally abused child victims might suffer from lower self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, less sense of social support, reduced resiliency, ego under-control, and insecure adult attachment (Riggs & Kaminski, 2010). Therefore, emotional abuse is an issue that needs to be tackled seriously in children.

Emotional abuse is usually more prone to children with an unsatisfactory parent-child relationship and unsatisfactory parenting styles (Hickox & Furnell, 1989). This mainly depends on how close the child is with the parents regarding their attachment bonds and level of trust to build emotional security. Most of the time, the parenting methods that are related to the disciplinary strategies used by the parents can be especially seen in the authoritarian parenting styles. Besides, the cultural values and the family systems play an important role in suggesting potential emotional abuse environment for the children. Lastly, it could also be a result of the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment, which is closely related to the family background and culture of how children are treated and the parenting methods in the family (Berzenski & Yates, 2010).

Parenting styles and their own exhibitions of behaviors in parenting children have effects on children in all ways. Baumrind's (1966) parenting

style model proposes about three parenting styles, which surrounds on two dimensions—demandingness and the responsiveness of the parents. First, parenting style characterized by high demandingness and high responsiveness is known as the authoritative parenting style, which is the most recognized and agreed to be beneficial to the child and the parent-child relationship. Second, authoritarian parenting style with high demandingness but low responsiveness is seen as strict control through rigid rules. Third, permissive parenting style with low demandingness but high responsiveness is where parents attempt to maintain a friendship with the child rather than a parent.

The psychological maladjustment in emotional abuse is mainly due to the parenting failure in empathy, which occurs to be a strong component of emotional abuse and a strong predictor of long-term psychological impairment to the child victim (Brodski & Hutz, 2012). The relationship between emotional abuse and parenting style is focused on the parents' attitude on disciplinary problems, behavior control, decision making, and children's emotional needs (Brodski & Hutz, 2012). If these attitudes are not possessed by parents in treating their child, it, therefore, yields great impacts in under-fulfilling the child's needs. Looking at a past research conducted on university students in Brazil to investigate the relationship between parenting styles (updated model of parenting styles) and the memory of emotional abuse, the authoritarian and negligent parenting styles showed higher means of memory of emotional abuse (Brodski & Hutz, 2012).

The Current Study

The first research objective was to determine the relationship between parenting styles and emotional abuse amongst adolescents in Kuala Lumpur. Further exploring the research objective, we would want to (1) determine the relationship of emotional abuse with the authoritarian parenting style, (2) determine the relationship of emotional abuse with permissive parenting style, and (3) determine the relationship of emotional abuse with authoritative parenting style amongst middle and late adolescents in Kuala Lumpur. Besides, the second research objective was to find out which parenting style is the strongest predictor of emotional abuse amongst adolescents in Kuala Lumpur.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

A total of 120 adolescents aged 15 to 18 years old from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, were recruited in the study via convenient sampling. The participants were contacted via different forms of social media. Convenience sampling through the Internet was utilized to obtain a large number of participants and to provide easy access to questionnaires through the Internet to reach the adolescents population, which is easily found on the Internet.

Participants were provided with informed consent prior to the test administration of the online questionnaires. All the instructions and relevant information about the study, test administrator, and test supervisor were put down accordingly for the understanding of the participants. The participants made clarifications before test-taking and were informed that they could retreat from the study anytime if reluctant to proceed. Lastly, participants were given email addresses of the test administrator and the test supervisor for further information or inquiries.

Measures

Parenting styles and dimensions questionnaire (PSDQ). PSDQ is a 32-item self-report questionnaire by the parents or could be an informant-reported questionnaire by the child (preferably older than preadolescents). This test is developed by Clyde C. Robinson, Barbara Mandelco, Susanne Frost Olsen, and Craig H. Hart in 1995, and further created in a shortened version in 2001. This questionnaire is to test the three different parenting styles based on Baumrind's model (Robinson, Mandelco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995).

The respondent is to answer 32 items with 5-point Likert-type scales with the options from "Never = 1" to "Always = 5." There were two identical sets of questionnaires, one for father and another for mother. The scores accumulated are summed up for each questionnaire of father and mother separately and obtained the mean score for each parenting style in different categories, which then will result in the categorization of Authoritative parenting style, Authoritarian parenting style, and Permissive parenting style, respectively.

Each item corresponding to the parenting styles reflects specific parenting practice: Authoritative

(four factors), Authoritarian (four factors), and Permissive (three factors), respectively. The Authoritative factors are: (a) warmth and involvement (11 items), (b) reasoning/induction (seven items), (c) democratic participation (five items), and (d) good-natured/easy-going (four items). Secondly, the Authoritarian factors are: (a) verbal hostility (four items), (b) corporal punishment (six items), (c) nonreasoning, punitive strategies (six items), and (d) directiveness (four items). Lastly, the Permissive factors are: (a) lack of follow-through (six items), (b) ignoring misbehavior (four items), and (c) self-confidence (five items) (Robinson et al., 1995). In the study, the father PSDQ had Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .915 (Authoritative), .827 (Authoritarian), and .398 (Permissive), whereas the mother PSDQ had Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .939 (Authoritative), .869 (Authoritarian), and .620 (Permissive).

Childhood trauma questionnaire (CTQ). CTQ is a screening tool that uses a self-report inventory method to identify past abuse and neglect cases, as well as the child-rearing environment. This test is developed by David P. Bernstein and Laura Fink and is published by The Psychological Corporation in 1997. The five domains of CTQ are as follows: physical abuse, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, sexual abuse, and physical neglect. The items in the questionnaires begin with "When I was growing up," as it is a retrospective questionnaire (Bernstein et al., 1994). The respondent is to answer 28 items with 5-Likert scale for each item with the options as follows: "Never True = 1", "Rarely True = 2", "Sometimes True = 3", "Often True = 4", and "Very Often True = 5". The scoring of CTQ separates the scores into columns of each of the five domains (i.e., physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect), and the item scores are summed into respective scale total score. In this study, only the emotional abuse domain will be utilized and reported. Finally, the cut off scores are used as a threshold for the categorization of four levels of maltreatment: none (5-8), low (9-12), moderate (13-15), and severe (16+). There are three items specialized for the minimization or denial scale, which are dichotomized ("Never = 0", "other responses = 1") and added up to make up a

total of 1 or if greater, suggesting false negative results (Bernstein et al., 1994).

CTQ is validated against the traumatic childhood interview, and the scores are compared between the two. The intercorrelation scores are high between CTQ and childhood traumatic interview where there is high significance for sexual abuse scores intercorrelation (severity), and significant in physical and emotional abuse scores intercorrelation. Reviewing both the test-retest reliability and convergent validity, these tests demonstrated that both instruments indicate a high level of convergence (Bernstein et al., 1994). In the study, the CTQ had Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .751.

Statistical Analyses

The data obtained was investigated using two major analyses: descriptive analysis and relationship analysis. For relationship analysis, the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was analyzed using Pearson's correlation analysis. Also, multiple regression analysis was used to identify the prediction level of the independent variable to the dependent variable.

Results

The correlations among the mother parenting styles and adolescents' emotional abuse are shown in Table 1. There was a significantly strong, positive correlation between mother's authoritarian parenting style and emotional abuse ($r = .597, p < .001$), with a high level of authoritarian parenting style by mother associated with a higher level of emotional abuse. Moreover, there was a significantly low, positive correlation between a mother's permissive parenting style and emotional abuse ($r = .290, p < .01$), with a high level of permissive parenting style by mother associated with a higher level of emotional abuse. However, there was a significantly moderate, negative correlation between mother's authoritative parenting style and emotional abuse ($r = -.437, p < .001$), with a high level of authoritative parenting style by mother associated with a lower level of emotional abuse.

Table 1 also shows that a mother's permissive parenting style significantly and positively correlated with mother's authoritarian parenting style ($r = .472, p < .001$) and mother's authoritative parenting style ($r = .268, p < .01$). These findings indicated that

adolescents with a high level of a mother's permissive parenting style were associated with a higher level of a mother's authoritarian parenting style and authoritative parenting style. However, it was shown that a mother's authoritarian parenting style and authoritative parenting style had no significant correlation.

Table 2 illustrates the correlation between a father's parenting styles and adolescents' emotional abuse. There was a significantly strong, positive correlation between a father's authoritarian parenting style and emotional abuse ($r = .516, p < .001$), with a high level of authoritarian parenting style by father associated with a higher level of emotional abuse. Also, there was a significantly moderate, positive correlation between a father's permissive parenting style and emotional abuse ($r = .350, p < .001$), with a high level of permissive parenting style by father associated with a higher level of emotional abuse. However, there was a significantly moderate, negative correlation between father's authoritative parenting style and emotional abuse ($r = -.324, p < .001$), with a high level of authoritative parenting style by father associated with a lower level of emotional abuse.

Table 2 also reveals that a father's permissive parenting style significantly and positively correlates with a father's authoritarian parenting style ($r = .510, p < .001$) and authoritative parenting style ($r = .207, p < .05$). These findings indicate that adolescents with a high level of permissive parenting style by a father are associated with a higher level of authoritarian parenting style and authoritative parenting style by father. However, a father's authoritarian parenting style and father's authoritative had no significant correlation.

Table 3 displays the multiple regression analysis in testing which mother's parenting style strongly predicted adolescents' emotional abuse. The results of the regression indicated that the total variance explained by the model was 35.5%, $F(2, 117) = 32.23, p < .001$, with mother's authoritarian and permissive parenting styles as the predictors of adolescents' emotional abuse. The mother's authoritarian parenting style made a statistically significant, larger unique contribution ($\beta = .590, p < .001$) compared to the mother's permissive parenting style with no significant unique contribution to the model.

Table 1

Correlational Analysis for Mother Parenting Styles and Emotional Abuse

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Mother authoritarian	1			
2. Mother permissive	.472***	1		
3. Mother authoritative	-.111	.268**	1	
4. Emotional abuse	.597***	.290**	-.437***	1

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Correlational Analysis for Father Parenting Styles and Emotional Abuse

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Father authoritarian	1			
2. Father permissive	.510***	1		
3. Father authoritative	.023	.207*	1	
4. Emotional abuse	.516***	.350***	-.324***	1

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Moreover, the second multiple regression analysis on a father's parenting style as predictors of adolescents' emotional abuse is illustrated in Table 4. With the father's authoritarian and permissive parenting styles as the predictors of adolescents' emotional abuse, it was found that the total variance explained by the model was 25.8%, $F(2, 117) = 20.33, p < .001$. The father's authoritarian parenting style made a statistically significant, larger unique contribution with $\beta = .416, p < .001$ compared to the father's permissive parenting style with no significant unique contribution to the model.

Discussion

Limited local research have studied the relationship between parenting style and emotional abuse among adolescents in Malaysia context. Hence, the current study examined the relationships among authoritarian mother, permissive mother, authoritative mother, authoritarian father, permissive father, authoritative father, and adolescents' emotional abuse as well as the predicting effect of parenting styles on adolescents' emotional abuse in Malaysia.

Based on the correlational analyses, it was found that the authoritarian parenting style for both father and mother is strongly correlated to emotional abuse among adolescents in Kuala Lumpur. Meanwhile, the father's permissive parenting style is moderately correlated to adolescents' emotional abuse in Kuala Lumpur. With a slight difference, the mother's permissive parenting style is lowly correlated to adolescents' emotional abuse in Kuala Lumpur. For the authoritative parenting style for both father and mother, a similar moderately negative correlation with emotional abuse was found among adolescents in Kuala Lumpur.

These results suggested that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have a close relationship with the presence and the degree of emotional abuse among adolescents. The higher the level of authoritarian or permissive parenting style, the greater the tendency of presence and intensity of emotional abuse experienced by adolescents. However, the findings have shown that the authoritative parenting style had a negative relationship with the presence and degree of emotional abuse among adolescents. This indicated that with a high level of authoritative parenting style (either from mother, father, or both),

Table 3

Multiple Regression Between Emotional Abuse and Mother's Authoritarian and Permissive Parenting Styles

Variables	B	SEB	β
Mother authoritarian	16.337	2.330	0.590
Mother permissive	0.352	2.248	0.013
Constant	-2.487	1.047	

Note. $R^2 = 0.355$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.344$; $F = 32.226$; $p < .001$

Table 4

Multiple Regression Between Emotional Abuse and Father's Authoritarian and Permissive Parenting Styles

Variables	B	SEB	β
Father authoritarian	13.068	2.829	0.416
Father permissive	5.090	2.924	0.157
Constant	-2.966	1.264	

Note. $R^2 = 0.258$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.245$; $F = 20.328$; $p < .001$

the lower the intensity of emotional abuse experienced by the adolescents. Thus, the authoritative parenting style is a protective factor of emotional abuse among adolescents.

The huge difference between authoritarian and permissive parenting styles and authoritative parenting style demonstrated that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles promote emotional abuse, whereas the authoritative parenting style prevents adolescents from experiencing emotional abuse. The findings were consistent with past research, where authoritarian and permissive parenting styles (regardless from father or mother) are significantly correlated to emotional abuse (Brodski & Hutz, 2012). This also confirms that similar results were yielded regardless in which country (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015).

The multiple regression analyses found that mother's authoritarian and permissive parenting styles explain more variance in adolescent's emotional abuse as compared to those parenting styles by father. This indicates that a mother's parenting styles played a more important role in the experience of emotional abuse among adolescents. In both the regression models (father and mother parenting styles), only the authoritarian parenting style made a statistically unique contribution to the prediction of adolescent's emotional abuse, whereas the permissive parenting style was not significant in predicting adolescent's emotional abuse. Based on these findings, the authoritarian parenting style practiced by both parents should be viewed as a crucial risk factor of adolescent's emotional abuse as compared to other parenting styles.

The limitations of this study included the retrospective nature of this study, where the participants are required to recall the emotional abuse experiences and memories of emotional abuse. The drawback of using recall in answering questionnaires was that the reported data might not be completely reliable as it is greatly dependent on the individual's memory or definition of emotional abuse. Thus, it was recommended that future research could adopt the prospective design to capture the relationships among the variables accurately. Secondly, both the instrument used were self-report instruments where there is a tendency to receive false positive or underreported results for the scale that measures emotional abuse. The results of this study were based on individuals' interpretations of their own experiences on emotional abuse. To get more valid and reliable data, future

researchers could collect data from different parties, for example, parents' reports and teachers' reports.

Conclusion

Parent-child relationship (e.g., parenting styles) indeed plays an important role in adolescent's well-being, affecting their emotional growth, attachment, and daily lives. Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were indeed positively related to promoting emotional abuse, whereas authoritative parenting styles prevented emotional abuse among adolescents in Kuala Lumpur. In line with other past research, the current study showed that parenting styles greatly affect an adolescent's emotional well-being. Specifically, the authoritarian parenting style practiced by both parents was found to be an important risk factor in predicting adolescent's emotional abuse as compared to other parenting styles. With the findings of this study, emotional abuse should get as much attention in the child maltreatment investigation in the community (e.g., schools and centers), society, and country by looking at the parenting styles.

Declaration of ownership

This report is our original work.

Conflict of interest

None.

Ethical clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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