Young Adults’ Perception of Parenting Style: A Retrospective Exploration

Abstract

Introduction: This study sought to understand the perception of parenting style among young adults using qualitative method. Methods: Five focus group discussions were carried out with 29 participants. A self-prepared semi-structured interview, face validated by experts in the field and socio demographic sheet and focus group discussion guide was used for collecting the data. The data were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Results: The overarching themes were privacy, control, autonomy, discipline, love, and warmth and unconditional acceptance of parents. Conclusion: Sociocultural background and culture seems to be one of the strongest determinants in assessing the perception of parenting style among young adults.

Keywords: Culture, parenting, young adults

Introduction

Parenting refers to the task of raising children and it can be a biological as well as a social process.[1] The word parenting is derived from the Latin verb “parere” to bring forth, develop, or educate[2] and is a continuous process; each development stage and milestone in an individual's life has the influence of parenting. This process also is influenced by one’s thinking, feeling, and acting in the cultural context of the family. The patterns of dependency—independency, ascendance–submissive, and conservative–liberalism all have their foundation in the early interaction within the family. Due to the collectivistic culture, Indian families have multiple caretakers involved, such as uncle, aunt, grandparents, and other relatives. Parental duties include providing physical security, intellectual security, emotional security, and financial support.[1]

One of the major conceptualizations of parenting style is Baumrind’s typology of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting.[3] Authoritative parenting is marked by parental warmth. The rules and reasoning are to promote obedience and discipline; parent’s statements and actions are always in sync.[4] It is also striking the right balance between discipline and warmth.[5] Authoritarian parenting is marked by control and less warmth also; they demand rigid adherence to the set of rules. They rely on hierarchy and deal with the child in a punitive manner.[4] They are demanding who apply power-assertive practices and lack responsiveness.[6] Permissive parenting is marked by less control and warmth. There is no consistency in the rules made; more of a laissez-faire attitude is promoted.[4] They are described as somewhat responsive but not demanding.[6,7] Uninvolved parenting is marked by extremely lax and un-controlling. Parents do not have time for their children.[8] These parents show less warmth and are less demanding and responsive.

The differences in parenting can be seen across the world. The factors such as socioeconomic status, urbanization, religion, and education have a high influence on the parenting practices. These practices are also deep rooted in culture.[8] Since parenting is bidirectional in nature, the perception of parenting style among young adults cannot be ignored. The perception of parenting style may be described as the interpretation and understanding of a parental behavior by an adolescent or adult.[9] Adolescence is reported to be a critical stage for children to adjust with the biological changes and assigned social roles. Thus, there are discrepancies between adolescence/young adults expectations from parents and parental expectations from them.[10]
It is important because in adolescence or adulthood, the individual is attaining freedom and takes self-decision, so it matters how he/she perceives his parents’ parenting styles.[4] In addition, the parenting style practiced by parents and the perceived parenting style may not be the same, they may differ.[11] According to Darling and Steinberg 1993, the personality development of an individual depends on the acceptance of their parents’ parenting style and practice. Research consistently demonstrates a link between children’s perceptions of their parents’ behavior and child outcomes. Despite the establishment of this relationship, there is a lack of research in young adults’ overall perceptions of the parental role retrospectively. The parenting style has a direct impact on the children’s perception and their well-being, which necessitates the investigation of children’s perception and expectation from parents. With this background, an attempt has been made to address the research questions in the form of understanding the young adult’s perception of parenting style in different developmental stages.

**Methods**

The present study was the first phase of the scale construction on the perception of parenting style among young adults, which was performed among the students enrolled in undergraduation in all the colleges affiliated to Bangalore University, India, from July 2018 to December 2018. Under qualitative framework, homogeneous purposive sampling was involved while selecting the respondents and the universe of the study were the students enrolled in undergraduation in all the colleges affiliated to Bangalore University. The respondents who are adults and raised by both the parents were included in the study. The study was approved by institution ethics committee and was carried out. All participants gave their oral and written consent and were informed that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Socio demographic sheet and Focus group discussion guide was used to collect the data. The focus group discussion guide was content validated by five experts viz. two psychiatrist, one psychologist and one psychiatric social worker. The target population for the focus group discussion (FGD) was young adults from different colleges located in urban Bengaluru. For collecting data, the colleges shortlisted were on the basis of zones particularly in the South zone of the city. The procedure involved the following steps:

1. Contacting the college and requesting for data collection and getting consent from the in-charge authority
2. Selection of sample and obtaining consent from them for participating in the study
3. Scheduling and conducting FGD.

Out of all, four colleges were shortlisted and contacted for data collection. A total of five FGDs were conducted in the premises of a college, which lasted for 45–60 min. Since a focus group is composed of individuals with similar characters, the inclusion criteria of the research also label the respondents to be in the age group of 18–22 years. The present study has used inductive thematic analysis for analyzing the data.[12] The steps followed were preparing the raw data files, identification of codes, formation of categories by clubbing similar codes, checking overlaps in codes, and revising and refining categories to establish themes.[13] The FGD was stopped when the discussion was replicating the data and details. The trustworthiness of data was acquired by peer debriefing in each stage of the analysis.

**Results**

Five focus groups were conducted; each group included a 5–8 numbers of participants with the age range of 18–22 years. Of 29 participants, 14 were male and 15 were female respondents. Five groups included male and female participants. The first and fourth group was among the male participant and the remaining three were conducted among the female participant. The mean age of the respondents is 20.20, with a standard deviation of 1.26. The summary of the thematic analysis identified eight major themes and twenty subthemes from the FGD regarding the perception of parenting style among young adults. The major themes are described as Autonomy, Privacy, Control, Discipline, Communication, Reaction on achievement and failure, Love and warmth, and Unconditional acceptance of parents. A discussion of these themes and the verbatim is presented.

**Theme I: Privacy**

Privacy reflects the space one has for self. The privacy of young adults has been discussed. Parents are inclined to monitor activities of young adults through checking, going through their belongings etc. Many parents engage in snooping to obtain information; they go through their children’s belongings and look through their cell phones. Going through kids belongings, which describes subtheme “don’t touch my phone” questions that whether it is right to snoop into kids’ belongings, whether they should be allowed to the realm of privacy away from the eyes of parents? Among some parents, understanding about the privacy of their teens and space is different. The answers were mixed mostly because of the difference in the domicile and the parent’s education.

The verbatim supporting the themes are as follows:

- “My mother chats with my friends through my phone, she sometimes goes through my chats as well…but nowadays she takes permission before using” (FGD 2, female).
- “We had enough privacy; they have never cross-checked for anything. They have given us enough space; they don’t check my mobile in my absence” (FGD 2, female).
Theme II: Control

Parental control is more to do with imposing rules in the family and to the child/adolescence. Many participants expressed that parents have a lot of influence in almost all the aspects of life. Few families allow autonomy during adolescence and allow doing what they want to do and of course coping with the consequences whether it is good or bad. Where most of the participants have the freedom to choose what they want, which includes their dressing, their choices, etc., most of the participants have a surprising answer for the same as follow:

“In childhood, most of the decision was taken by parents only, from dress to every aspect of life, I had no say on anything they won’t even ask anything” (FGD 3, male).

“My father influences a lot of decision in my life. I wanted to study science but he made me take commerce.” (FGD 1, male).

Most of the parents actually contemplate the decision of the young adults and so they try imposing their decision resulting in a lot of restricted behavior. On one hand, autonomy promotes self-reliance and independence; on the other hand, control is more of imposing rules and regulations. To be in the same continuity, the next theme discussed is autonomy.

Theme III: Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the independence one has on his/her actions. This theme reflects the respondent’s abilities in their life decisions. It is developed through the family relationship. Hence, family turmoil and rebelliousness from the young adults go hand in hand. Most of the families give autonomy to the adolescence/young adults by giving them responsibilities over their actions and freedom within limits. In most of the Indian families, even though the power of decision lies inside the family, there is the great influence of external factors as well. These external factors are extended family members, friends, and neighbor.

The verbatim are as follows:

“I was a very anxious person, but my parents wanted me to be independent that how they gave me a lot of freedom. That's how I learned a lot.” (FGD2, F).

My aunt told my parents that I should stop dancing as it would affect my studies later. FGD5 F2.

In particular, it was observed that the autonomy of young adults increases with the age and gender had a strong influence on the restriction of certain activities.

Theme IV: Discipline

Disciplining is about teaching one how to behave and obey rules or a code of conduct. Parents do teach their children how to behave in a certain situation. Thus, the subthemes emerged are rules to follow and punishment. In all the families, there will be certain rules which children have to follow, so these rules are made based on society and family? When the rules are broken by young adults, parents follow strategies to manage their behavior that can be negative as well as positive. These strategies are also labeled as punishment. Respondents discussed how parents have adopted harsh strategies to discipline them. It is reflected in the statement.

Respondents discussed different rules that have to be followed in their family.

My mother is very firm about me being transparent about all the happenings …she just loses her mind if she gets to know that I am lying. FGD2 R4.

In my home mainly it is about the time, I need to go back home at a particular time otherwise I will be in trouble. FGD4 F6.

Theme V: Love and warmth

It is of paramount importance to have a loving relationship with parents. The parent–child relation influences a lot of relationships in future because the primary relations are always imparted in our later lives. However, it is not in the case of Indian parents because they do not express their love openly and directly to their children. The subthemes emerged are mothers warmth and fathers in-expression and vicarious admiration. It was also discussed that parents withhold their thoughts and feeling regarding love. Despite respondent’s desire about their parents to be more expressive, these young adults accept and acknowledge that they can feel their love.

The struggles my mom had gone through to bring me up is just incomparable with my dad’s involvement (FGD3 F2).

I feel fathers find it difficult to express their love but they are there at every step of our life ...in my case also the mother is more expressive FGD2 R4.

Vicarious admiration is appreciating one’s qualities to a third person. Many of the respondents discussed that parents do not appreciate their children and do not express it directly. They do it via a third person.

But my mother doesn’t say anything; even if I score good marks she doesn’t say anything. But she says all these things to relatives and neighbours’ very proudly about my marks/scores. FGD4 F7.

Theme VI: Unconditional acceptance of parents

Respondents have positioned their parents in a different way. They believe that during adolescence, parents are more matured and capable to take a decision (any aspect) on their behalf. This deep-rooted belief paves the way to the unconditional acceptance of parents. There was a consensus among the participant that whatever parents do is for the good future of the children. The respondents articulated that parents taking a decision on behalf of
The quality of the relationship is embedded in a group rather than in the individual. It actually suggests the cultural phenomena of identity which is associated with positive adjustment. The expectation of privacy starts when children move to adolescence and it increases toward adulthood. It has also been reported in the previous research that monitoring and tracking children’s behavior were protective factors since it is associated with positive adjustment. It is unlike the West where autonomy is promoted. At this stage, most of the adolescents tend to break free from parental control and assert their independence which results in greater conflict with parents. The context determining privacy rules cannot be applied equally to people of different ages because competencies and social roles change over time. Participants have reported that during early adulthood, they were given more space and privacy when compared to the adolescence. However, this idea of privacy invasion does not apply to the present study because of the cultural factors. Participant consider snooping, checking electronics, solicitation an acceptable behaviour. The idea of interdependence is more compared to autonomy.

Some families are concerned about the ability of young people to make a decision on their own. The findings in the present study indicate about the different cultural meanings of autonomy and privacy. Although authoritative parenting has been a norm in India, parents are encouraging autonomy. More openness indicates better relationship quality with parents. The quality of the relationship is also a predictor of adolescents’ belief that parents deserve knowledge of their activities. The level of parental solicitation is consistent over time, whereas control decreases with age. It denotes the expansion of privacy boundaries. It actually suggests the cultural phenomena of identity which is embedded in a group rather than in the individual.

Previous research has suggested that parents try to control the maladaptive behavior of the children to improve children’s behavior over time. It goes with the findings of the present study which maps the disciplining aspect in the subtheme of punishment. Many a time, parents use pressure tactics and in response to adolescents trait reactance and behavioral reactance. Consistent with the finding of the present study, young adults reported that parents do love them, but mothers express, whereas fathers do not express. Parents strive to raise their children with warmth. The parent–child relationship is based on the foundation of love and warmth, but expressions of these features vary as a function of culture.

As discussed in the results, Indian parents, especially fathers, do not inexpressive compared to the mothers. Expressiveness also depends upon the uniqueness of family and personality of the individual. Similar findings have been also seen in the study done by which indicates that individuals hold their expression by hiding themselves and anger is an experience of in expression. Very handful of research has been done on the unconditional acceptance of parents. Although the parents often attempt to hinder the young adults’ endorsement of autonomy by imposing rules, regulation, and cultural values, the present study demonstrates that young adults consider that as a part of their responsibilities and accept them unconditionally. Similar to the findings of the research studies, the current study has reported that responsibility as a construct is predicted by cultural-specific patterns of relationship. It is also based on the circumstances.

Conclusion

The qualitative finding of the study threw light on the different dimensions of perception of parenting among young adults pertaining to the themes discussed. It contributes the literature with the cultural essence of difference in the perception of parenting style and the influence of diverse background, language, cultural background, and the type of family.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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