

# The Influence of Parenting Styles on Aggressive Behaviour in Typically Developing Children and Children with Special Needs

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**Keywords:** Parenting Styles, Aggressive Behaviour, Typically Developing Children, Children with Special Needs.

**Abstract:** Parents can directly or indirectly impact children's early development. Specifically, parenting styles can influence their behaviour, whether they are typically developing children or children with special needs. This paper explores the influence of parenting styles on aggressive behaviour, using typically developing children and children with special needs as research subjects. Therefore, by collecting and analysing relevant researches it was found that parenting styles had a significant relationship with aggressive behaviour in typically developing children. However, parenting styles do not necessarily have a significant relationship with aggressive behaviour in children with special needs. Different parenting styles have different impacts on children. Positive parenting styles are associated with reduced aggressive behaviour, while negative parenting styles are associated with increased aggressive behaviour. Besides, research also found that there were other mediators and moderators influencing the relationship between parenting styles and children's aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, the review identifies limitations in the existing literature, such as research samples tending to be limited and narrow, a lack of research on aggressive behaviour in children with special needs, and a lack of studies comparing typically developing children and children with special needs. These findings of the paper provide theoretical implications for parents in educating their children.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Aggressive behaviour (AB) is a common behavioural problem in young children, and it has a significant impact on children's physical and mental development, social adaptability, and peer relationships. As the main influencers of children's early development, parents' parenting styles (PSs) directly or indirectly shape their behaviour and emotional responses. Moreover, AB is more complicated in children with special needs (CSN), who have social environment and familial PSs in addition to individual differences. Therefore, examining the effects of PSs on the AB in both typically developing (TD) children and CSN has great theoretical and practical significance for understanding the development of children's behaviour and guiding the practice of family education.

Diverse parenting styles are influenced by variations in cultural backgrounds, the degree of economic development, and the policy environments. These macro factors affect PSs and children's behavioural development within families. From the

macro to the micro level, there are significant differences in parental expectations, parenting goals, and various methods within individual families, and these differences differ in different countries and socioeconomic backgrounds. These differences are reflected in children's behavioural outcomes, especially in the expression of AB, as well as in PSs. Therefore, it is true that parenting styles may play a major role in determining children's aggressive behaviour.

## 2 OVERVIEW

### 2.1 Parenting Styles and Their Classification

PSs refer to the attitudes and behaviours of parents in educating and raising their children in daily life. It briefly describes various parenting patterns and behaviours of parents. It represents a relatively stable style of education that does not change according to the situation (Xing, 2009). PSs are also called family

upbringing styles, educational methods, rearing styles and so on.

Many researchers have classified PSs based on different perspectives and dimensions. Baumrind, a famous American psychologist, classified PSs into four categories based on two dimensions of parental responsiveness and demandingness: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritative PSs are demanding and responsive, establishing authority over their children while guiding their behaviour. Parents show democracy, tolerance and support for their children, as well as appropriate demands and restrictions, typically raise children who are emotionally active and happy, with high levels of self-esteem and self-control. Authoritarian parents are demanding, ordering children to obey their instructions, setting clear rules, and suppressing children's self-expression and sense of independence. This approach tends to raise children who are prone to anxiety, withdrawal, depression, isolation, and AB when frustrated. Indulgent parents are characterised by permissiveness and over-indulgence, giving children no norms, requirements or constraints. Consequently, such parenting may result in children who are often immature, impulsive, resistant and rebellious, or overly dependent on adults and lacking in perseverance. Rejecting parents demonstrate neither demanding nor responsive, neither supervising nor supportive, but may reject or neglect children. Such parenting may result in children who are deficient in cognitive, emotional and social interaction skills and are aggressive (Baumrind, 1991). In China, scholars Guan and Liu classify PSs as authoritarian, democratic and tolerant from the perspective of the parent-child relationship (Fei, 2020). The democratic parents approach treats children as equals, values and respects their ideas, and tends to promote independence in children.

## 2.2 Aggressive Behaviour

AB are actions that are directly or indirectly injurious to others and are problematic behaviours. It is divided into physical, verbal and instrumental attacks in terms of manifestation. It is divided into proactive attack and reactive attack in the cause of attack, and instrumental attack and hostile attack in the motive of attack. Chinese scholars Lin, Yang, and Huang have proposed that the meaning of AB: aggression manifests itself in psycho-emotional or personality traits, such as anger, excitement, and hostility, which ultimately manifests itself in AB (Chen, 2019).

## 3 THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTING STYLES ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR IN THE TYPICALLY DEVELOPING CHILDREN

In order to investigate the relationship between PSs and AB in TD children, different researchers have used different research methods and data analysis methods. Studies have consistently found that PSs have a significant relationship with the AB of TD children. In particular, negative PSs are associated with an increase in children's AB, while positive PSs can reduce children's AB. Furthermore, different dimensions within maternal and paternal PSs have unique effects on children's AB. Chen conducted a study on 460 students in grades 5 and 6 in two primary schools. Parenting Styles Questionnaire (completed by the parents) and Children's Aggression Scale (completed by children) were used to evaluate parenting styles and children's aggression. Data were analysed using SPSS 20.0. The findings of the study indicated a significant correlation between PSs and children's AB. Children were less likely to exhibit AB when their parents demonstrated emotional warmth and understanding. Conversely, children were more likely to exhibit AB when their parents used punishment and rejection. During further analysis, it was found that the rejection factor of the father's PS had a positive impact on the children's AB, while the emotional warmth factor had a negative impact on the children's AB. The overprotection factor of fathers did not significantly affect the children's AB. However, the overprotective factor in mothers' PS positively predicted children's AB, whereas the emotional warmth factor was not significant in predicting children's AB (Chen, 2019). Duan et al. selected 460 children in grades 4, 5 and 6 in two primary schools as participants. The measures included the Buss-Perry Aggression Scale and the Parenting Style Evaluation Scale. Data were analysed using SPSS16.0 and AMOS17.0 software. According to the study, there is a close relationship between PSs and children's AB. Children's AB can be positively predicted by a combination of paternal factors, including Punishment and Harshness, Rejection and Denial, and Overprotection. In addition, maternal factors, including Rejection and Denial, Punishment and Harshness, and Excessive Control, also positively predicted children's AB (Duan et al., 2015). These studies, by selecting the same number of participants

and using different software analyses, consistently concluded that PSs have a significant correlation with children's AB and that negative factors in PSs positively predicted children's AB, which means that negative PSs are associated with increased aggression in children. Furthermore, the study by Duan et al. also found the effect of gender differences on children's AB, with boys tending to use direct physical aggression and girls tending to use indirect aggression (Duan et al., 2015). Besides, Chen found a mediating role of peer relationships. The study indicated that peer relationships mediated the effects of paternal emotional warmth and maternal rejection on children's AB. Paternal PSs are emotional warmth and understanding that will strengthen the connections between children and their peers, leading in turn a significant decrease in AB, and good peer relationships will have a positive impact on AB. On the contrary, when the mother treats her children mostly with rejection, it will lead to a significant increase in children's AB, which in turn will lead to a negative peer relationship (Chen, 2019). This suggests that PSs influence a person's social characteristics in addition to having a direct impact on AB.

Different types of PSs can have different effects on children's AB. Children with democratic PS have weaker AB. Spoiling, authoritarian, and permissive (neglectful) PSs increase children's AB. Fei and Xing found that the relationship between spoiling, permissive (neglectful) and authoritarian PSs and children's AB was positive, and the relationship between democratic PS and children's AB was negative. Their research analysed the reasons for different PSs leading to children's AB. Parents employing a doting PS tend to satisfy all of a child's needs unconditionally, often overindulging them. This can result in AB when the child's demands are not met. Permissive parents treat their children with indifference and disregard, and often fail to provide sufficient behavioural restraint. This is often accompanied by low parental responsiveness and demands, which may lead to emotional instability, low self-esteem, and passive-aggressive tendencies in children. Authoritarian parents have high demands on their children's behaviour and control their children, which leads to rebelliousness and AB, as children may learn coercive tactics from their parents and use force when resolving conflicts with peers. Democratic parents involve understanding and respecting children, treating them equally, and listening to their perspectives. These PSs give

children independent thoughts and positive emotions and are less likely to result in AB (Xing, 2009, Fei, 2020). Xing also found differential effects of varying PSs on proactive and reactive aggression. Indulgent parenting was significantly related to children's proactive aggression, while both authoritarian and neglectful PSs. These three unfavourable PSs have different levels of influence on children's proactive aggression, with indulgent parenting demonstrating the least impact, followed by neglecting parenting, and authoritarian parenting exhibiting the greatest impact (Xing, 2009).

Furthermore, there are various mediating and moderating factors that influence the relationship between PSs and AB, such as the mediating role of family climate found by Li et al. Different PSs reflect different family climates, which in turn influence children's AB. Positive PSs, which include parental understanding, warmth and support, establish family values, where children feel relaxed and comfortable in this family atmosphere, and their AB is reduced. On the contrary, negative PSs, such as parental denial and strict authoritarianism, create a serious and unfavourable family atmosphere, which leads to an increase in children's AB (Li et al., 2024). del Puerto-Golzarri et al. also examined the effect of the interaction of temperament type and PS on children's AB. The temperament type for this study considered only three temperament categories including negative affect, effortful control, and impulsivity. A more authoritarian PS combined with a child's highly impulsive temperament is associated with increased AB. Furthermore, children's AB also influences PSs. For example, increased child AB may lead to more authoritarian PS in an attempt to restrain the child's behaviour. This can, in turn, lead to increased child rebelliousness and subsequent AB, creating a cyclical pattern. Therefore, there is a bidirectional effect of PSs and children's AB (del Puerto-Golzarri et al., 2022).

#### **4 THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTING STYLES ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

To analyse the relationship between PSs and AB in CSN, the literature search focused specifically on studies concerning children with Attention-

Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), intellectual disability, hearing impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD).

For children with intellectual disabilities, PS has a significant relationship with AB of children with intellectual disabilities. For example, Zong tested 227 intellectually disabled students and their parents from 12 special education schools in grades 1-9, under the age of 18. Data were collected using the Problematic Behaviour Scale (specially designed for children with intellectual disabilities) and the Parenting Styles Scale, where the problematic behaviours in the Problematic Behaviour Scale include AB. The findings showed that there was a negative significant correlation between PSs and the occurrence of AB in children with intellectual disabilities. Negative PSs such as doting, authoritarianism, inconsistency, and permissiveness can significantly and positively influence the AB of children with intellectual disabilities, and there is a two-by-two positive correlation with AB. However, positive and democratic PSs do not significantly and positively influence the AB of children with intellectual disabilities (Zong, 2021).

For children with ODD, Zhang et al. selected 44 children with ODD as the study group and 50 TD children as the control group. Data were measured using the Achenbach Child Behaviour Rating Scale (CBCL) and Parenting Style Measurement Unit (EMBU). The results indicated that parenting emotional warmth and understanding were negatively correlated with AB, but parenting punishment, harsh treatment and a lack of denial positively correlated with AB. Therefore, negative PSs have a negative impact on children's behaviour, while positive PSs can reduce the symptoms of ODD and also reduce AB in children with ODD (Zhang et al, 2020).

For children with ASD, Lin et al. conducted a comparative analysis of 70 children with ASD and 98 TD children, and showed that AB in children with ASD was positively correlated with hostile/coercive PSs. Examining the impact of highly controlling parenting practices on children with ASD is crucial. Caring for a child with ASD can be challenging for parents due to the child's social communication difficulties, restricted interests, or repetitive behaviours. These challenges, coupled with emotional and behavioural difficulties, may lead parents to feel anxious and adopt controlling behaviours, which in turn can manifest as a hostile/coercive PS. This negative PS, in turn, can increase both ASD symptoms and AB. In addition, the study found that the maternal Autism Spectrum

Quotient (AQ) attentional switching domain moderated the relationship between hostile/coercive parenting and AB in children with ASD. Specifically, a significant association was observed between mothers' hostile/coercive parenting and AB in children with ASD when maternal attentional switching abilities were at medium to high levels. Children with ASD were more aggressive when their parents used more hostile and coercive methods. The correlation between maternal hostile/coercive PS and AB was not significant when maternal attention switching problems were at low levels. Reducing hostile/coercive PSs and improving maternal attention switching problems in mothers of children with ASD may reduce AB in children with ASD (Lin et al, 2023).

Most particularly in the case of hearing impaired children, there was no significant correlation between PSs and AB. For example, Wang et al. selected 80 hearing impaired children aged 3-5 years old as their research participants and showed AB among these children was not associated with their parents' PSs. The reason for this may be that the social withdrawal behaviour of hearing impaired children tends to receive more attention than AB. Parents will pay more attention to those withdrawn children, offering them greater encouragement and support while exercising less control, encouraging the children to solve the problems independently when they encounter difficulties, explore on their own without relying on their parents, cultivate the children's curiosity, give the children the opportunity and space to show their talents, and allow them freedom in their actions and thinking without undue restriction (Wang et al, 2009).

Studies of various groups of CSN, including those with ADHD, intellectual disabilities, ASD, and ODD, demonstrate a significant association between PSs and AB. Negative PSs exacerbate the symptoms and AB of these children. However, in the study of the hearing impaired children group, the effect of PSs on AB was not significant.

In addition, there is also a bidirectional influence between PSs and the AB of CSN, where PSs have a relevant influence on the AB of CSN, and in turn, the AB of CSN affects PSs. Studies, such as that by Zong, have concluded that poor parenting behaviours can trigger a wide range of problematic behaviours in children with intellectual disabilities, including AB, in turn, children's problematic behaviours can exacerbate the perpetuation of poor PSs, creating a vicious circle (Zong, 2021). Liu et al. similarly found that negative PSs and AB of ADHD affected each other. Children's AB often lead to negative emotions



in parents, and when children exhibit AB, parents will remind, scold, admonish, and punish in an attempt to stop and change their children's behaviours. However, children may struggle to regulate their behaviour when this negative PS continues, and punishments may often fail, but instead, they will reinforce the occurrence of AB (Lu et al, 2006).

## 5 DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

### 5.1 Overall Conclusion

This paper summarises previous studies about the influence of PSs on AB in TD children and CSN, which found that PSs had a significant relationship with AB in TD children. Positive PSs, such as the factors of warmth, understanding, and support, are associated with reduced AB, while negative PSs, including denial, controlling behaviour, punishment, and over-indulgence, are associated with increased AB. However, PSs do not necessarily have a significant relationship with AB in CSN. The relationship between PSs and AB varies among CSN. This may be due to the diverse symptoms presented by different conditions, leading parents to adopt varying PSs. For instance, no significant relationship has been observed between AB and PSs in children with hearing impairments, while such relationships have been found in children with ADHD, intellectual disabilities, ASD, and ODD.

Overall, studies on both TD children and CSN have shown that positive PSs reduce the incidence of AB, while negative PSs increase AB. Furthermore, parents of children exhibiting AB tend to employ negative PSs, creating mutual influence.

Summarising the relevant studies, it was also found that there are other mediators and moderators influencing the relationship between PSs and children's AB, such as gender differences, peer relationships, temperament type, family atmosphere, and mothers' attention-switching problems. Therefore, other influences should also be considered in relation to the impact of PSs and AB.

### 5.2 Suggestions

PSs have an important impact on children's AB, so in order to reduce children's AB, parents should pay attention to choosing positive PSs when educating their children, providing children warmth, understanding, support and tolerance. This promotes

healthy development and reduces undesirable behaviours, particularly AB (Chen, 2019). Instead of spoiling or neglecting their children, parents should provide ample love and care, respect their children's perspectives, and guide them in establishing sound values and developing independence. This, in turn, can promote positive peer interactions and family dynamics, enhance peer interaction skills and feelings of security, and potentially reduce aggressive tendencies (Fei, 2020). Furthermore, the influence of PSs and children's AB is mutual, so parents should be positive role models who demonstrate appropriate behaviours that children can emulate. This approach can reduce undesirable behaviours and cultivate positive ones. Finally, group counselling can be used to intervene in parents' negative PSs, so that PSs can be adjusted and improved in a timely manner, thus reducing the frequency of children's AB to a certain extent (Zong, 2021).

### 5.3 Limitation and Prospects

Current research on the influence of PSs on the AB of TD children and CSN still has a huge space for exploration. Firstly, the current research samples tend to be limited and narrow. Existing studies of TD children often focus on those in kindergartens and primary and secondary schools within certain urban areas. Similarly, research on CSN primarily involves those with ADHD, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, ASD, and ODD. In future research, it is necessary to broaden the scope to include diverse populations of CSN, such as different grades, locations (both urban and rural), and settings. Secondly, in terms of research content, studies on CSN tend to concentrate on the effects of PSs on their problematic behaviours, with a relative lack of specific research exploring the impact on their AB. AB can be studied specifically in the future. Finally, other mediators of PSs and children's AB, such as parental education, parental personality, teachers' teaching styles, and mass media can also be studied in depth. In addition, limited research has comparatively analysed TD children and CSN. Due to the unique characteristics of CSN, distinct effects of PSs on their AB compared to TD children. Therefore, future comparative studies should examine these potential differences.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This paper examined the influence of PSs on AB in TD children and CSN. It was found that varying PSs

had distinct effects on this behaviour. For TD children, positive PSs tend to reduce child AB, whereas negative PSs tend to increase it. For CSN, there was a significant relationship between AB and PSs for the majority of subgroups, but there was no significant relationship between PSs for AB of children with hearing impairment. Moreover, mediating and moderating factors such as gender differences, peer relationships, temperament type, and family atmosphere also affect the relationship between PSs and children's AB. Therefore, parents of TD children and CSN should pay attention to using positive PSs, regulating their own behaviours, and giving warmth, understanding and support to their children, so that they can form good behavioural norms, reduce the occurrence of AB, and allow children to grow up healthily.

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