

Relationship between Perceived Parenting Styles and Coping Capability among Malaysian Secondary School Students

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Abstract—This research aimed to investigate the relationship between parenting styles and coping capability among Malaysian adolescents. A single survey was conducted in two secondary schools in Pahang, Malaysia and had successfully recruited 161 students. After data clearing, the final sample consisted of 140 participants with equal gender, age ranged from 13 to 16 years old. Results showed there was no difference in terms of authoritarian parenting among parents while mothers preferred authoritative parenting as compared to fathers. Parenting styles correlated with adolescents' coping capability. There was no gender difference in adolescents' coping styles.

Keywords—Parenting style; Coping capability; Adolescent

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the issues nowadays revolves around the elevated level of stress amongst local adolescents. On a positive note, optimum stress can act as motivational force for someone to work hard towards goals. However negative consequences such as truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, or social delinquency will start to kick in when stress is not handled properly [1]. Therefore, one's stress coping capability is important to maintain an optimal stress level [2].

An effective coping strategy can determine one's outcomes in facing and handling stressful situations. One can learn coping skills from his or her surroundings and daily events besides having them naturally. Parents being the role model to children are the ones who have the strongest influence in shaping and molding the coping behaviours of children [3]. Besides being most vulnerable to the influences of external factors, coping strategies that adolescents have adopted tend to prolong into adulthood.

According to Baumrind [4], different parenting styles such as authoritative, authoritarian and permissive are proven able to shape children differently. Authoritarian parenting usually caused aggression and delinquency in children in the western context [4] because when children could not bear the stress of being control strictly, they tend to be rebellious and behaved delinquently. Nevertheless, some children may turn out well under this parenting too.

Overall, it can be seen that parenting styles may have different impact on children's development, this paths the direction for the current study to explore the relationship between parenting styles and adolescents' coping capability in the Malaysian context.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. Parenting Styles

Baumrind [4] has conceptualized parenting into three main types: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. Authoritative reflects parenting with a balance in discipline and affection, reasoning with children and being responsive to children's demands. Authoritarian parenting values obedience and favours power assertion. It constitutes of traditional parenting structure whereby children are given no autonomy but to accept the discipline without questions. In contrast, permissive parenting gives children high level of freedom and does not restraint their behaviours unless physical harm is involved [5,6]. The present study focuses on exploring authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles specifically in the Malaysian context.

B. Coping Capability

Coping simply refers to efforts in terms of cognition and behaviour to reduce distress. According to Folkman [7], coping is the effort put to manage the events regardless of outcomes. Compas and colleagues [8] however, defined coping as conscious effort to self-regulate one's emotion, cognition, physiology and behaviour in response to surrounding stressors. Based on a paradigm [9], coping behaviours can be classified into three functions that serve different scenarios. Firstly, problem-focused coping is used to reduce or manage demands arise from events. Secondly, emotion-focused coping is used to manage or minimize the tense feelings. The last function, which is appraisal-focused coping, is to redefine demands so that the level of strain is manageable [9]. Since coping effort depends on the surroundings factors and reflects one's psychosocial competency, thus coping capability will be used interchangeably with psychosocial competency here.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Parenting and Impacts on Adolescents

Previous researches have shown that different parenting styles lead to different outcomes and progress development in children in terms of their well-being, psychosocial competency and responding to the environmental demands [6,10]. Chen and colleagues [10] conducted a research with 304 second-grade Chinese students and 512 parents in Beijing to examine the association between parenting styles

and students' adjustment. They discovered authoritarian parenting had positive relationship with students' aggressive behaviours and negative relationships with students' social competency and academic achievement. Years later, Ang [11] conducted a study with 548 Asian adolescents and found authoritative father encourage adolescents' self-reliance in coping, problem-solving and perseverance in academic challenges. However within the same sample, Malay respondents with authoritarian mother were more adaptable to school's demography. Above studies demonstrated authoritarianism was not universally correlated with negative outcomes in children and adolescents.

Inconsistencies in parenting styles with its outcomes in the Asian culture can be attributed to parental warmth and the concept of "guan" in the Chinese context. Chao [12] discussed how Asians, especially Chinese emphasizes on the ideas of "guan" and "chiao sun" which indicate parental control and training respectively and are similar to the characteristics of authoritarian. Stewart et al. [13] examined "guan" and concluded that it correlated highly with parental warmth but not significantly correlated with control factor. This is consistent with the construct of authoritative. These findings have illustrated how Asian parenting falls between the continuum of authoritative and authoritarian parenting.

Furthermore, Keshavarz and Baharudin [14] stated that Malaysian parents regardless of races endorsed authoritarian parenting and it is well accepted locally. This is because Malaysia is one of the collectivist country where children are taught to conform to group's rules, behave in socially acceptable manner, inhibit own needs and be considerate over others within the group where in this context is to obey parents [14]. Given these findings, current study is interested in examining preferred parenting styles and the association between parenting styles with adolescents' adjustments in Malaysia.

B. Parenting and Adolescents' Coping

Parenting styles have shown to have direct effects on children or adolescents' coping capabilities. Finkenauer and team [15] concluded from their data of 1,359 adolescents that the level of parental acceptance and control influenced children's social adjustment. Perceiving parents as authoritarian, those who restrict and exert high level of control causes more children to response aggressively towards external factors. Hence they encounter emotional problems such as stress and depression. In contrast, parents who are strict but also show support, acceptance and are involve in children's activities lead to more positive outcomes, which are reflected in their better psychosocial adjustment [15]. Nevertheless, Meesters and Muris [16] performed a study in the west with 132 adolescents and found parental emotional warmth which was associated with authoritative did not have strong connection to adolescents' active coping. On the other hand, parental control which was associated with authoritarianism seemed to have more unique relationship with adolescents' coping capability. Parental control is indeed related to adolescents' active coping as well as avoidance, passive coping [16]. Parenting has close connections with the development of adolescents'

coping while the present study intends to explore relationship between parenting styles with adolescents' coping capability.

C. Gender Differences

Lastly, in a large-scale study involving 1,990 children and adolescents with age ranging from 7-16 years old, it was found that girls favoured emotion-focused coping while boys favoured avoidant coping. Interestingly, gender differences were more obvious in coping with social situation than academic challenges [17]. In another separate study [18], similar pattern of gender differences was found. Girls had higher interpersonal emotional intelligence and thus they preferred emotional coping strategies. These findings reflect a trend of female favouring emotion-focused coping.

IV. AIMS OF STUDY

A total of five hypotheses have been proposed for this study.

- 1) *Adolescents perceive their father as being authoritarian relative to mother.*
- 2) *Adolescents perceive their mother as being authoritative relative to father.*
- 3) *Adolescents with perceived authoritarian paternal parenting will display higher coping capability.*
- 4) *Adolescents with perceived authoritative maternal parenting will display higher coping capability.*
- 5) *Adolescent females will favour emotional-focused coping as compared to adolescent males.*

V. METHOD

A. Participants

A total of 161 students were recruited from two public secondary schools in Malaysia. After data clearing, a final sample of 140 participants with equal gender was randomly selected using SPSS software. Participants' age ranged from 13 to 16 years old with a mean of 14.48 years (SD = 1.15).

B. Measurements

The two instruments used were Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (A-COPE). There were two version of PAQ with appropriate gender references such as "mother" was changed to "father" and "she" was changed to "he". Instruments were being translated from English into Bahasa Malaysia through forward- and back-translation.

1) *Parental Authority Questionnaire:* A 30-item instrument designed to measure perceived parenting styles in terms of authority and disciplinary practices from child's perspective [19]. All items are rated on a 5-points Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The 30 items are divided into three subscales: Permissive; Authoritarian; Authoritative. Ten items in each subscale are summed up and subscale with the highest score indicates the type of parenting adopted. The PAQ has good internal consistency with alphas ranging from .74 to .87 and stable test-retest reliabilities over two-week period ranging

from .77 to .92. Lastly, the PAQ also has good construct validity [19].

2) *Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem*

Experiences (A-COPE): A-COPE is a 54-item instrument designed to measure adolescents' coping behaviours in managing problems and difficult situations. Items were developed through literature reviews and interviews with adolescents. The A-COPE items generally serve three primary functions of coping which are problem-focused coping, coping through appraisal, and emotion-focused coping [9]. Scoring is done by reversed-scored nine items (7, 8, 19, 24, 26, 28, 42, 46, 49) and summing all 54-items to obtain a final score. Higher score indicates higher level of coping. The individual score for the three functions can be obtained by summing responses of items under all the coping patterns that were clustered according to functions. A-COPE has fairly good internal consistency with alphas ranging from .50 to .75. However no data on the stability is available [9].

C. *Procedures*

Three secondary schools were approached, one for pilot study while another two for main data collection. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from relevant government agencies. Survey was conducted only during students' free period as not to cause any disruption to their lessons. Classes were selected randomly based on availability with the exclusion of Form 3 and Form 5 classes due to the government examinations. Counselors assisted in distributing parent's consent letter via students one or two days before the survey was conducted. On the day, parent's consent letters were collected and student's consent letters were distributed and collected on the spot. Only students with parental consent and willing to participate were given the questionnaires. Average time needed to complete the questionnaires was approximately 30 minutes.

VI. RESULTS

A. *Parenting Styles*

To test the favoured parenting styles, a between subjects *t*-test was used with an alpha level of .05. As opposed to what was being hypothesized, fathers were not being perceived as authoritarian over mothers, $t(139) = 1.33$, $p > .05$ (see TABLE I). Fathers and mothers in this sample simply displayed similar level of authoritarian parenting.

As hypothesized, there was significant difference in terms of authoritative parenting style, $t(139) = 3.06$, $p < .01$ (see TABLE I). The mean score for paternal authoritative parenting was 34.90 (SD = 6.44) while the mean for maternal authoritative parenting was 36.11 (SD = 5.84). This indicated Malaysian mothers were being perceived to adopt more authoritative parenting as compared to father.

B. *Parenting Styles Correlates with Adolescents' Coping Capability*

Bivariate correlation test was used to examine the relationship between parenting styles with adolescents' coping ability. As hypothesized, adolescents with perceived authoritarian paternal parenting displayed higher level of coping capability. The correlation was significant with $r = .25$, $p < .01$, which means the higher the level of authoritarian paternal parenting, the higher coping ability one will displays. The correlation was strong with only 1% chance of the results occurred by sampling error or by chance. The third hypothesis was supported by the result.

Next, adolescents with perceived authoritative maternal parenting also displayed higher level of coping capability as hypothesized. The correlation was significant with $r = .41$, $p < .01$ which means the higher the level of authoritative maternal parenting, the higher coping ability one will display. The fourth hypothesis was thus supported as well.

C. *Gender Differences*

Lastly, to test the hypothesis of females prefer emotion-focused coping relative to males, independent-groups *t*-test was used with alpha level of .05. Males had a mean of 78.94 (SD= 8.11) for emotion-focused coping while females had a mean of 79.99 (SD= 4.90) as shown in TABLE II. Using independent-groups *t* test, the difference was not significant, $t(138) = -.92$, $p > .05$ (see TABLE II). This indicated females did not prefer emotion-focused coping style over males. Therefore, the last hypothesis was rejected.

TABLE I. PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST

Variable	Father	Mother	<i>t</i> (139)
Authoritarian Parenting	33.97 (SD = 6.22)	34.38 (SD = 6.00)	1.33
Authoritative Parenting	34.90 (SD = 6.44)	36.11 (SD = 5.84)	3.06**

** $p < .01$.

Figure 1. Parenting styles.

TABLE II. INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T-TEST

Variable	Male	Female	<i>t</i> (138)
Emotion-Focused Coping	78.94 (SD = 8.11)	79.99 (SD = 4.90)	-.92

** $p < .01$.

Figure 2. Emotion-focused coping between genders

VII. DISCUSSION

A. *Parenting Styles*

This study hypothesized that adolescents perceive fathers as authoritarian relative to mothers but was not supported by the results. Nevertheless, present analysis was congruent with Ong's [20] study in Singapore which discovered fathers being less strict and harsh as expected whereas mothers were relatively stricter and controlling. Elias and Tan [21] also performed a study Malaysian youths and found both fathers

and mothers were being perceived as authoritative instead. They speculated higher parents' education level might have contributed to their findings. Likewise, it is speculated in this study that fathers might be exposed to the negative outcomes of authoritarianism through education or media and hence decreased in practice. Present analysis thus indicated Malaysian fathers are not perceived as more authoritarian relative to mothers.

Next, this study hypothesized that Malaysian mothers will be perceived as authoritative relative to father and was supported by the result. This is in line with Ong's [20] findings whereby mothers are not only nurturing, affectionate and supportive but also more reasonable with adolescents. Current result also supported McKinney and Renk's [22] study as older adolescents perceived mothers as more authoritative and permissive. Despite being relatively strict, Asian mothers are responsive, warm and supportive towards their children. Thus, Malaysian mothers are still being perceived as authoritative despite their strictness.

B. Parenting Styles and Adolescents' Coping Capability

This study predicted adolescents with authoritarian paternal parenting will display higher coping capability and this hypothesis was supported. Authoritarian parenting among Asians consists the "guan" element which correlated with parental warmth and authoritativeness to some extent [10,13]. Fathers who were strict in disciplining might still provide warmth and guidance to children. Constructive disciplining helps adolescents to behave accordingly and develops better coping capability. Furthermore, cultural context can explain the present finding. Malay, Chinese and Indian culture views children's obedience as being respectful to adults. At the same time, they emphasize spiritual growth, self-control and passion within children too [14]. Therefore, authoritarian paternal parenting can still yield positive outcomes among adolescents under these cultural practices.

Next, this study hypothesized that adolescents with authoritative maternal parenting will display higher level of coping capability. Result finding confirms the prediction. Mothers who adopt authoritative parenting could provide support, guidance and approval to children in developing constructive coping approaches which in turn produced adolescents with high coping ability [2]. Authoritative mothers who provide warmth, support and guidance directly assist adolescents' autonomy development. When strong autonomy is present, one will then have good self-concept, emotional well-being and healthy life-adjustment. Present finding supported earlier findings that authoritative maternal parenting correlated with adolescents adjustments. However, this finding needs to be interpreted with caution because it provides only correlational and cross-sectional information but not distinctive and in-depth conclusion.

C. Gender Differences in Coping Capability

Lastly, the present study also hypothesized that female adolescents will prefer emotion-focused coping behaviours as compared to male. Results did not support this hypothesis. Nevertheless, there are other studies which found that females tend to rely more on social support [23] or active

coping [24] which were problem-focused strategies but not emotion-focused coping. These inconsistent findings could be due to the various dimensions of coping defined by different researchers. For example, Patterson and McCubbin [9] identified three functions of coping behaviours with social support being regarded as problem-focused strategy while avoidance as emotion-focused strategy. In contrast, Ayers and colleagues [25] identified avoidance as a factor by itself while social support was being categorized under both emotional- and problem-focused strategy. Hence, confusions might arise without fixed definitions for coping behaviours. Given this, much caution is needed when generalizing the present finding.

D. Limitations and Strengths of Study

This study has a few limitations. Firstly, it relied solely on adolescents' self-report measure where perception of parenting behaviours could have been influenced by their beliefs and not consistent with actual parenting behaviour [26,27]. Another limitation was the use of cross-sectional design [28]. One's coping processes would not be the same across the years as these variables fluctuated in accordance to life experiences. The third limitation was correlational design could only provide information in regards to the relationships between variables but was unable to determine the causes and effects among these variables to provide more in-depth understanding [22].

Despite the limitations, steps have been taken to ensure mothers' and fathers' parenting scores were not combined as averaging the parenting scores might over- or underrate parenting styles and also possible influence on adolescents [29]. Instruments used are reliable while pilot study was conducted to obtain the reliability of translated instruments used in Malaysian context.

E. Recommendations for Future Studies

Parents might adopt different parenting styles while certain combinations of parenting might be more or less effective due to the buffering effects. Having one authoritative parent could offset the less positive outcomes associated with uninvolved parent [29]. Thus, adolescents' development under the consistent or inconsistent parenting can be further investigated. Secondly, future study may examine how specific parenting dimensions such as warmth or support contribute to adolescents' development across cultures (21). Lastly, longitudinal study can be conducted to further elaborate and support the present findings.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore perceived parenting styles among Malaysian students and also the relationship between perceived parenting styles with adolescents' coping capability. Malaysian fathers are not perceived to be authoritarian over mothers while mothers are perceived to be more authoritative over fathers. Parenting styles, specifically authoritarian paternal and authoritative maternal parenting correlate with adolescents' coping capability. Furthermore, no gender difference is evident for coping strategies. The present findings have provided some insights to practitioners

and parents in promoting adolescents' psychosocial development and well-being.

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