

The Effects of Parental Stress, Marital Satisfaction, and Parenting Configuration on Chinese Parenting Styles

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of parental stress, marital satisfaction, and parenting configuration on Chinese parenting styles using data from 103 parents (57 mothers and 46 fathers). The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ), Marital Adjustment Test (MAT), and Parental Stress Scale (PSS) were utilized to measure the variables. Results indicate that parental stress significantly predicts authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles, with higher stress levels associated with more authoritarian and permissive behaviours, and less authoritative parenting. Marital satisfaction and parenting configuration did not significantly predict parenting styles. The findings highlight the critical role of parental stress in influencing parenting practices and imply the needs for stress reduction interventions to promote healthier parenting styles in Chinese families.

KEYWORDS

Parenting style; parental stress; marital satisfaction; parenting configuration

1 Introduction

Parenting style is a pivotal factor influencing a child's cognitive, physical, and socioemotional development (Agarwal & Alex, 2017). It encompasses various modes of parental behaviours, values, and practices. In developmental psychology, parenting style is defined as the influence of parental involvement on children's future competence and development (Lee & Brown, 2020). This study aims to investigate how parental stress, marital satisfaction, and parenting configuration affect parenting styles in Chinese contexts.

1.1 Parenting Styles

Much of the research on parenting styles in Western societies is based on Baumrind's model (1971), which identifies two critical aspects of parenting: responsiveness (parental supportiveness or warmth) and demandingness (behaviour control). The different combinations of these aspects give rise to three prototypical patterns of parenting styles. The authoritarian parenting style can be explained by high demands and control, coupled with a lack of responsiveness to the child's needs. Parents with this style value obedience, emphasize respect for authority, and enforce rules rigidly without room for discussion (Baumrind, 1971). Authoritarian parenting is often linked with strict discipline and high expectations, which can sometimes lead to heightened levels of stress and conflict within the family. The authoritative parenting style, on the other hand, is marked by high levels of both demandingness and responsiveness. Interactions between children and parents in this style are more democratic and egalitarian (Fonseca et al., 2020).

Authoritative parents set firm guidelines and boundaries, provide rational explanations, and allow children some input in decision-making processes. This parenting style is often associated with positive child outcomes, including higher academic achievement, better psychological well-being, and improved social skills. Lastly, the permissive parenting style is characterized by high responsiveness and low demandingness. Permissive parents are highly attuned to their children's needs, display leniency, and avoid punishment and confrontation (Baumrind, 1971).

However, this style is relatively rare in Asian cultures (Wu et al., 2002). In permissive parenting, the lack of boundaries and controls can sometimes lead to issues with authority and self-discipline in children.

Factors influencing parenting styles can be child-related, such as the child's health status, or parent-related (Xu et al., 2005). Understanding how parental characteristics shape parenting styles is essential for fostering healthy child development and positive outcomes. To date, most research on the factors influencing parenting styles has been conducted in Western countries, with few studies focusing on Chinese contexts. Due to unique cultural and social characteristics in Chinese parenting, such as the use of harsh discipline (Liu & Wang, 2015), this study aims to explore the relationships between parental stress, marital satisfaction, parenting configuration, and different parenting styles in China.

1.2 Parental Stress

Parental stress is a common experience for many parents, arising from the challenges and demands of raising children, such as educational responsibilities and lack of emotional support (Crnic, 2002). Parenting stress specifically refers to the distress experienced when the demands of parenting exceed available resources (Avidin, 1992). Numerous studies have shown a negative relationship between parenting stress and authoritative parenting. For example, Graves (2016) and Carapito et al. (2018) found a positive association between parenting stress and both permissive and authoritarian parenting styles, and a negative association with authoritative parenting.

Parents exhibiting an authoritarian style are more likely to experience higher levels of parenting stress compared to those with authoritative or permissive styles (Park & Walton-Moss, 2012). This heightened stress is linked to negative parenting behaviours, such as reduced maternal sensitivity, decreased responsiveness and warmth, and increased punitive practices (Xu et al., 2005). These behaviours are characteristic of the authoritarian parenting style. In China, especially during the one-child policy era, traditional Chinese parents often had high expectations for their child, leading to increased parental stress (Fonseca, Moreira & Canayarro, 2020).

Research indicates that parental stress can significantly impact the quality of parent-child interactions. High levels of stress are associated with more negative and less positive interactions with children. For instance, stressed parents may be less patient, more irritable, and more likely to use harsh disciplinary methods. This can create a cycle where negative parenting behaviours lead to more stress and conflict, further exacerbating the situation.

The impact of parental stress on child outcomes is well-documented. Children of stressed parents are more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes, including behavioural problems, emotional difficulties, and poor academic performance (Deater-Deckard, 1998; Evans, 2011). This is particularly concerning in the Chinese context, where high parental expectations and academic pressure can amplify the effects of stress (Chao, 1994; Chen, 2010). Given the well-documented negative impact of authoritarian and permissive parenting styles on child outcomes (Baumrind, 1971; Wu et al., 2002), it is essential to explore parenting stress in the context of high-stress situations in China and identify changes that could promote more adaptive parenting practices (Liu & Wang, 2015; Xu et al., 2005).

1.3 Marital Satisfaction

Marital relationships encompass both positive and negative aspects, including partner support, marital quality, hostility, and disagreement. Positive aspects contribute to a nurturing environment for children, while negative aspects can create a stressful home environment that adversely affects parenting practices. Studies on the association between marital relationships and parenting often vary in their definitions and measurements of marital quality and satisfaction, leading to diverse findings. Kjobli & Hagen (2009) emphasized the complexity of measuring marital quality and satisfaction, noting that both positive and negative dimensions significantly influence parenting styles.

Research has consistently linked marital satisfaction with parenting styles, though the direct effects are not always clear (Grych, 2002). Erel and Burman (1995) found modest but consistent associations between marital quality and high-quality parent–child relationships, suggesting that positive marital relationships foster better parent-child interactions. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Krishnakumar and Buehler (2000) demonstrated a significant negative relationship between interparental conflict and positive parenting, indicating that conflicts between parents undermine effective parenting practices.

Nelson et al. (2009) found that marital dissatisfaction was linked to lower supportive responses from both mothers and fathers when their children expressed negative emotions. Koen et al. (2012) further claimed that marital quality, partner support, and low ineffective arguing are significantly associated with authoritative parenting styles, characterized by high demandingness and responsiveness. High marital satisfaction can create a supportive and harmonious environment that promotes positive parenting practices. Parents in satisfied marriages are more likely to cooperate and share parenting responsibilities, leading to more consistent and effective parenting.

Conversely, marital conflict acts as a significant stressor, increasing parental anger, which can be directed towards children, resulting in reduced affection and warmth (Osborne & Fincham, 1996). Marital maladjustment can disrupt the socio-emotional stability of the family, leading to ineffective and inconsistent parenting practices, such as unpredictable discipline, lack of emotional support, and inconsistent communication, all of which negatively affect children's development and well-being (Tavassolie et al., 2016).

The impact of marital satisfaction on child outcomes is significant. Children from homes with high marital satisfaction tend to have better emotional and behavioural outcomes (Cummings & Davies, 2010). They are more likely to feel secure and supported, which can enhance their social skills and academic performance (Grych & Fincham, 2001). On the other hand, children from homes with high marital conflict may experience anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Overall, there is a need for more targeted research to fully understand the direct relationship between marital satisfaction and specific parenting styles. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how marital satisfaction influences parenting styles in Chinese families, considering the unique cultural and social context (Liu & Wang, 2015).

1.4 Parenting Configuration

Parenting configuration refers to the structure and dynamics of the family, including the roles and involvement of each parent in the child's upbringing (Parke, 2002). In traditional Chinese families, parenting roles are often clearly defined, with fathers typically taking on the role of disciplinarian and mothers focusing on nurturing and caregiving (Chao & Tseng, 2002). However, these roles have evolved over time, particularly in urban areas where both parents are likely to be working (Chen, 2010). Research indicates that shared parenting, where both parents are actively involved in raising the child, is associated with more positive parenting styles (Cabrera et al., 2014).

Shared parenting can lead to more balanced and consistent parenting practices, as both parents contribute to setting rules, providing support, and disciplining the child (Lamb, 2010). This cooperative approach can reduce the stress on each parent, as responsibilities are shared, leading to a more harmonious family environment (McHale & Lindahl, 2011). In contrast, when one parent bears the majority of the parenting responsibilities, it can lead to increased stress and potential burnout (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). This imbalance can affect the quality of parenting, leading to more authoritarian or permissive practices. For example, a single parent or a primary caregiver might resort to stricter control or leniency due to exhaustion or lack of support (Craig & Mullan, 2011).

The concept of parenting configuration also includes the extended family, which plays a significant role in many Chinese families. Grandparents often take on substantial caregiving responsibilities, which can influence parenting styles (Xu & Chi, 2018). The involvement of extended family members can provide additional support and resources, potentially reducing parental stress and promoting more authoritative parenting practices (Chen et al., 2011). However, it can also lead to conflicts and inconsistencies in parenting approaches, especially if grandparents have different views on child-rearing (Zhang, 2007). Understanding the impact of parenting configuration on parenting styles is crucial, particularly in the Chinese context where family structures and roles are undergoing significant changes (Liu et al., 2019). This study aims to explore how different parenting configurations, including the involvement of extended family, influence parenting styles and child outcomes in China (Wang & Chang, 2006).

2 Research Hypotheses

To systematically explore the relationships between parental stress, marital satisfaction, parenting configuration, and parenting styles within the Chinese context, this study posits the following hypotheses:

1. Marital satisfaction, parental stress, and parenting configuration will be significantly associated with the authoritative parenting style.
2. Marital satisfaction, parental stress, and parenting configuration will be significantly associated with the authoritarian parenting style.
3. Marital satisfaction, parental stress, and parenting configuration will be significantly associated with the permissive parenting style.

These hypotheses aim to elucidate the complex interplay between parental and marital factors and their influence on parenting styles, with a particular focus on the unique cultural and social dynamics present in Chinese families. This research will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how these variables interact to shape parenting behaviors and child outcomes.

3 Methods

3.1 Participants

The study utilized data from 103 participants, selected from a broader pool of 245 total respondents. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to be parents currently raising at least one child. All participants were recruited from China, primarily from the Guangdong Province and Shanghai. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 59 years, with a mean age of 43.72 years ($SD = 8.40$). The sample comprised 57 mothers (55.3%) and 46 fathers (44.7%). Recruitment was conducted through the researchers' personal networks. Specifically, the researchers sent a Qualtrics survey link to their family members, friends, colleagues, and extended networks, requesting their

participation in the study. This convenience sampling method was chosen to facilitate access to a diverse pool of respondents while ensuring a sufficient sample size for statistical analysis.

3.2 Design and Measures

This study employed a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the relationships between parenting configuration, marital satisfaction, parental stress, and parenting styles. The research instrument was a comprehensive Qualtrics questionnaire, which was divided into five sections totaling 74 questions: demographic characteristics, parenting configuration, marital satisfaction, parental stress, and parenting styles. To ensure participants could easily comprehend the questions, all items were translated into Chinese.

3.3 Demographic Characteristics

Participants completed the first section of the questionnaire to provide background information relevant to the study. This section collected data on age, parental role, gender identity, educational attainment, employment status, and marital status. Except for age, which was provided on a continuous scale, other demographic variables were assessed using multiple-choice questions. These questions were designed by the researcher and auto-translated into Chinese on the Qualtrics platform. The translations were subsequently reviewed and revised by the researcher, who is a native Chinese speaker, to ensure accuracy and clarity.

3.4 Parenting Configuration

To determine the distribution of childcare responsibilities among participants, the study utilized a specific item on parenting configuration. This item was included in the questionnaire and asked participants: "Who is taking care of your child most of the time?" The response options provided were: (1) Yourself alone, (2) Balanced between you and your partner/spouse/relative, (3) Grandparents, family, or friends, (4) Nanny or social workers, and (5) Others (please specify). This question was designed by the researcher to capture a broad range of caregiving arrangements. It was initially written in English and then auto-translated into Chinese using Qualtrics. The translation was subsequently reviewed and refined by the researcher to ensure cultural appropriateness and comprehensibility for Chinese-speaking participants. This one-item scale was chosen for its simplicity, clarity, and ability to directly address the core aspect of parenting configuration, making it a practical and effective measure for the study.

For the final statistical analysis, responses were categorized into two groups: "solo parenting" and "shared parenting". The response "Yourself alone" was classified as solo parenting, while the remaining options (Balanced between you and your partner/spouse/relative, Grandparents, family, or friends, Nanny or social workers, and Others) were combined into a single category labeled as shared parenting. This categorization allowed for a clear comparison between solo and shared parenting configurations.

3.5 Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction was assessed using the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) by Locke and Wallace (1959). The MAT comprises 15 items designed to measure various aspects of marital satisfaction, including agreement on matters important to the relationship, frequency of conflict, and overall happiness within the marriage. Sample items include questions about the degree of agreement on recreational activities, sexual relations, and handling family finances. Each item is either rated on a

Likert scale or requires participants to select from multiple options. The scores from each item were summed to form a total marital satisfaction score, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction within the marriage. The MAT was translated into Chinese and its validity demonstrated by Ni et al. (2021).

3.6 Parental Stress

Parental stress was measured using the Parental Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Berry and Jones (1995). The PSS includes 18 items that assess both positive and negative aspects of parenthood. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Example items include: "I am happy in my role as a parent" and "Having children leaves little time and flexibility in my life". The total parental stress score was computed by summing the item scores, with higher scores indicating greater levels of stress. The PSS was revised and validated for a Chinese population by Cheung (2000), ensuring that the instrument accurately reflects the stress experiences of Chinese parents.

3.7 Parenting Styles

Parenting styles were assessed using the Parenting Style and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) developed by Robinson et al. (2001). The PSDQ evaluates three primary dimensions of parenting: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. The questionnaire consists of 32 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Sample items include: "I encourage my child to talk about his/her troubles" (Authoritative), "I yell or shout when my child misbehaves" (Authoritarian), and "I allow my child to do whatever he/she wants" (Permissive). A mean score for each parenting style dimension was calculated for subsequent analysis. Higher scores on each subscale indicated a stronger endorsement of the corresponding parenting style. The PSDQ was revised and validated for use in a Chinese context by Fu et al. (2020), ensuring cultural relevance and measurement accuracy.

4 Procedure and Data Analytic Plan

Prior to data collection, the ethical protocol for this study was reviewed and approved by the dissertation supervisor. Participants received an information sheet detailing the research aim and were required to read and sign a consent form before completing the questionnaire. This informed consent process ensured that participants were fully aware of the study's purpose and their rights as participants.

The questionnaire was administered in the following sequence: Section 1 (Q1-Q6) collected demographic information; Section 2 (Q7) is the parenting configuration question. Section 3 (Q9-Q24) included the Marital Satisfaction Test; Section 4 (Q25-Q42) comprised the Parental Stress Scale; and Section 5 (Q43-Q74) contained the Parenting Style and Dimensions Questionnaire. Notably, question 8 asked about participants' marital status. If participants indicated they were married, they were directed to complete Section 3. If they indicated they were divorced, the questionnaire automatically skipped to Section 3, thereby ensuring relevance and reducing respondent burden.

Data collection was conducted online using the Qualtrics platform over a one-month period. Upon completion of data collection, the data were exported from Qualtrics to SPSS for analysis. A Cronbach's alpha test was performed to assess the reliability of the scales used to measure the variables (marital satisfaction, parental stress, and parenting styles). Additionally, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to determine the statistical significance of the relationships

between the independent variables and the various parenting styles.

5 Ethical Considerations

Several ethical measures were implemented to maintain the ethical integrity of the study and protect participants’ well-being. At the outset, participants received an information sheet (see Appendix A) and consent form (see Appendix B) assuring them of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The information sheet explained that any personally identifiable information would be removed and that responses would remain anonymous. Participants were informed that they could skip any questions they felt uncomfortable answering, thus respecting their autonomy and comfort.

Data were securely stored on UCL OneDrive, accessible only to the researchers, and retained only as long as necessary for analysis. Afterward, the data would be securely destroyed. To address any potential discomfort or distress that participants might experience while completing the questionnaire, a psychological counseling hotline in China was provided at the end of the questionnaire. This measure ensured that participants had access to support if needed.

In summary, the study’s methodology was meticulously designed to ensure robust data collection and analysis while upholding the highest ethical standards. The careful translation and validation of instruments, the systematic recruitment of participants, and the rigorous data collection and analysis procedures all contribute to the reliability and validity of the study’s findings.

6 Results

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

This study aimed to explore the impact of parenting configuration, marital satisfaction, and parental stress on three distinct parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and multiple linear regression analyses were performed using SPSS to determine the relationships between these variables.

6.2 Case Processing Summary

The case processing summary (see Table 1) indicates that out of the 103 total cases, 100 cases (97.1%) were valid, and 3 cases (2.9%) were excluded due to listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 1 Case Processing Summary

	N	%
Valid	100	97.1
Excluded	3	2.9
Total	103	100.0

Note: Cases were excluded due to listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

6.3 Reliability Statistics

The reliability of the three scales used in the study was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha (See Table 2). The Marital Satisfaction Scale, consisting of 15 items, had a Cronbach’s alpha of .760. This indicates an acceptable level of internal consistency for this scale, suggesting that the items are reasonably correlated with one another.

The Parental Stress Scale, which includes 18 items, demonstrated a higher reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .823. This suggests a good level of internal consistency, indicating that the items reliably measure the construct of parental stress.

The Parenting Style Scale, comprising 32 items, exhibited an excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .898. This high alpha value indicates a very strong internal consistency among the items, confirming that the scale reliably measures different parenting styles.

Table 2 Reliability Statistics for the Scales

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Marital Satisfaction	.760	15
Parental Stress	.823	18
Parenting Style	.898	32

Note: Cronbach's alpha values indicate the internal consistency of each scale.

6.4 Multiple Linear Regression Analyses

Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to evaluate how well parenting configuration, marital satisfaction, and parental stress predict each of the three parenting styles. These analyses aimed to understand the influence of these factors on parenting behaviors, providing insights into the dynamics of family life and parental decision-making.

6.5 Authoritative Parenting Style

The regression model for authoritative parenting style explained 10.0% of the variance ($R^2 = .100$). The adjusted R^2 was 0.070, indicating that approximately 7% of the variability in authoritative parenting scores is explained by the model, adjusted for sample size. The standard error of the estimate was 0.51096, reflecting the average deviation of the observed values from the predicted values.

The ANOVA results showed that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 89) = 3.308$, $p = .024$. This indicates that the model significantly predicts the Authoritative Parenting Style.

Table 3 presents the regression coefficients. Parental Stress was found to be a significant negative predictor of Authoritative Parenting Style ($\beta = -.274$, $t = -2.612$, $p = .011$). This negative beta coefficient suggests that higher levels of parental stress are associated with lower authoritative parenting scores. Every unit increase in the parental stress score, the participants are predicted on average .018 lower on the mean authoritative parenting score. On the other hand, Marital Satisfaction ($\beta = .101$, $t = .958$, $p = .341$) and Parenting Configuration ($\beta = -.130$, $t = -1.262$, $p = .210$) were not significant predictors.

Table 3 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for Authoritative Parenting Style

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value	Sig.
(Constant)	4.868	0.536		9.083	<0.001
Parenting Configuration	-0.205	0.162	-.0130	-1.262	0.210
Parental Stress	-0.018	0.007	-0.274	-2.612	0.011
Marital Satisfaction	0.003	0.003	0.101	0.958	0.341

Note. Dependent Variable: Authoritative Parenting Style

These findings highlight the significant impact of parental stress on authoritative parenting, aligning with previous research that emphasizes the challenges stressed parents face in maintaining consistent, supportive, and responsive parenting practices. The absence of significant effects for

marital satisfaction and Parenting Configuration suggests these factors do not substantially influence authoritative parenting style in this context.

6.6 Authoritarian Parenting Style

The regression model for authoritarian parenting style explained 12.5% of the variance ($R^2 = .125$). The adjusted R^2 , which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, was 0.095, suggesting that the predictors account for approximately 9.5% of the variability in authoritarian parenting scores when adjusted for sample size. The standard error of the estimate was 0.54813, indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line.

The ANOVA results indicated that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 89) = 4.231$, $p = .008$. This significance suggests that the model, as a whole, reliably predicts the Authoritarian Parenting Style.

Table 4 presents the regression coefficients. The analysis revealed that Parental Stress was a significant predictor of Authoritarian Parenting Style ($\beta = -.364$, $t = -3.523$, $p < .011$). This positive beta coefficient indicates that higher levels of parental stress are associated with higher authoritarian parenting scores. Every unit increase in the parental stress score, the participants are predicted on average .026 higher on the mean authoritarian parenting score. In contrast, Marital Satisfaction ($\beta = .044$, $t = .419$, $p = .677$) and Parenting Configuration ($\beta = .017$, $t = .166$, $p = .868$) were not significant predictors, suggesting that these variables do not have a notable impact on authoritarian parenting style in this model.

Table 4 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for Authoritarian Parenting Style

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value	Sig.
(Constant)	0.345	0.575		0.599	0.551
Parenting Configuration	0.029	0.174	0.017	0.166	0.868
Parental Stress	0.026	0.007	0.364	3.523	<0.011
Marital Satisfaction	0.001	0.003	0.044	0.419	0.677

Note. Dependent Variable: Authoritarian Parenting Style

The results suggest that parental stress significantly contributes to authoritarian parenting behaviors. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which often links high stress levels to stricter, more controlling parenting practices. The lack of significant findings for marital satisfaction and parenting configuration indicates that these factors may not play a central role in shaping authoritarian parenting within this sample.

6.7 Permissive Parenting Style

The regression model for permissive parenting style explained 9.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .091$). The adjusted R^2 , was 0.061, indicating that about 6.1% of the variability in permissive parenting scores is explained by the model, adjusted for sample size. The standard error of the estimate was 0.75483, reflecting the average deviation of the observed values from the predicted values.

The ANOVA results indicated that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 89) = 2.983$, $p = .036$. This suggests that the model provides a significant prediction of the Permissive Parenting Style.

Table 5 presents the regression coefficients. The analysis revealed that Parental Stress was a significant predictor of Permissive Parenting Style ($\beta = -.313$, $t = 2.974$, $p = .004$). This positive beta coefficient indicates that higher levels of parental stress are associated with higher permissive parenting scores. Every unit increase in the parental stress score, the participants are predicted on

average .026 higher on the mean authoritarian parenting score. In contrast, Marital Satisfaction Score ($\beta = .063$, $\beta = .574$, $\beta = .552$) and Parenting Configuration ($\beta = .066$, $\beta = .639$, $\beta = .525$) were not significant predictors.

Table 5 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for Permissive Parenting Style

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value	Sig.
(Constant)	0.714	0.792		0.902	0.369
Parenting Configuration	0.153	0.240	0.066	0.639	0.525
Parental Stress	0.031	0.010	0.313	2.964	0.004
Marital Satisfaction	0.002	0.004	0.063	0.597	0.552

Note. Dependent Variable: Permissive Parenting Style

The results indicate that parental stress significantly contributes to permissive parenting behaviors. This finding is consistent with literature suggesting that parents under high stress may adopt more lenient and less structured parenting practices as a coping mechanism. The lack of significant findings for marital satisfaction and parenting configuration implies these factors do not have a notable impact on permissive parenting within this sample.

6.8 Summary of Findings

The regression analyses across the three parenting styles revealed consistent patterns concerning parental stress. Parental stress was a significant predictor for all three parenting styles: positively associated with authoritarian and permissive styles, and negatively associated with the authoritative style. This highlights the pervasive impact of stress on parenting behaviors. In contrast, neither marital satisfaction nor parenting configuration showed significant relationships with any of the parenting styles. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing parental stress could potentially influence parenting behaviors across different styles, promoting healthier and more balanced approaches to parenting. Future research might explore additional factors that could interact with or mediate the effects of stress on parenting, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

7 Discussion

This study aimed to explore the impact of parenting configuration, marital satisfaction, and parental stress on three distinct parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. The use of descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and multiple linear regression analyses allowed for a detailed examination of the relationships between these variables. The results revealed that parental stress is a significant predictor for all three parenting styles. Specifically, higher levels of parental stress were associated with higher authoritarian and permissive parenting scores and lower authoritative parenting scores. In contrast, marital satisfaction and parenting configuration did not significantly predict any of the parenting styles.

7.1 Interpretation of Findings

The significant impact of parental stress on parenting styles aligns with previous research, emphasizing the pervasive influence of stress on parental behaviours. The finding that higher stress levels correlate with an increase in authoritarian and permissive parenting, and a decrease in authoritative parenting, suggests that stress may lead to more extreme parenting behaviours—

either more controlling and harsher or more lenient and inconsistent.

7.2 Authoritative Parenting Style

The negative association between parental stress and authoritative parenting underscores the challenges stressed parents face in maintaining consistent, supportive, and responsive parenting practices. Authoritative parenting, characterized by high responsiveness and high demands, requires a balanced approach that may be difficult to sustain under high stress. This finding is consistent with literature suggesting that stress undermines parents' ability to be nurturing and consistent, leading to less effective parenting practices (Baumrind, 1991; Belsky, 1984). The demands of authoritative parenting, which include setting clear boundaries while being responsive to children's needs, require significant emotional regulation and patience. Under stress, parents may find it challenging to maintain this balance, resulting in a shift away from authoritative practices.

7.3 Authoritarian Parenting Style

The positive association between parental stress and authoritarian parenting indicates that stressed parents are more likely to adopt a more controlling and less responsive parenting style. Authoritarian parenting is often characterized by strict rules and expectations with little warmth or feedback. This finding aligns with existing research that links high stress levels to stricter, more controlling parenting practices as a way to manage the perceived chaos or threats in the environment (Conger et al., 2002; Crnic & Low, 2002). When parents experience high stress, their tolerance for misbehaviour may decrease, leading them to enforce rules more rigidly and resort to punitive measures. This approach may be a coping mechanism to regain a sense of control in a stressful environment.

7.4 Permissive Parenting Style

Similarly, the positive relationship between parental stress and permissive parenting suggests that stressed parents may also become more lenient and inconsistent in their discipline. Permissive parenting is defined by high responsiveness but low demands, often leading to a lack of structure and guidance. This result supports the notion that stressed parents may become overwhelmed and thus more permissive, potentially as a coping mechanism to avoid conflict or further stress (Coplan et al., 2002). Under stress, parents might lack the energy or emotional resources to enforce rules and boundaries, opting instead for a more lenient approach to minimize immediate conflict and reduce their stress. The non-significant impact of marital satisfaction and parenting configuration on parenting styles suggests that these factors may not directly influence parenting behaviors as much as parental stress does. This finding is somewhat unexpected, given that marital satisfaction has been linked to better parenting practices in other studies (Cox & Paley, 1997; Kitzmann, 2000). It is possible that the direct effect of marital satisfaction on parenting styles may be less pronounced when accounting for the overwhelming influence of parental stress. Marital satisfaction might influence parenting indirectly by affecting the overall stress levels within the family, rather than having a direct impact on parenting styles.

8 Implications for Theory and Practice

8.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the dynamics between stress and

parenting styles. The significant role of parental stress in shaping parenting behaviours underscores the need to consider stress as a central factor in models of parenting. This study supports the stress model of parenting, which posits that high levels of stress can lead to less effective parenting practices (Abidin, 1992; Deater-Deckard, 2004). Future theoretical frameworks should integrate stress as a core component influencing parenting styles, potentially interacting with other factors such as personality traits, social support, and coping mechanisms. For instance, examining how different types of stress (e.g., financial stress, work-related stress) specifically impact parenting could provide more nuanced insights into the stress-parenting relationship.

8.2 Practical Implications

The results highlight the importance of addressing parental stress in interventions aimed at improving parenting practices. Programs designed to reduce parental stress could have a significant impact on promoting healthier and more balanced parenting styles. Interventions could include stress management techniques, such as mindfulness training, counselling, and support groups, aimed at helping parents cope with the demands of parenting. Mindfulness training, for example, has been shown to reduce stress and improve emotional regulation, which could help parents maintain more consistent and supportive parenting practices.

Furthermore, given that marital satisfaction did not significantly predict parenting styles in this study, interventions might focus more directly on reducing stress rather than solely enhancing marital satisfaction. However, improving marital relationships could still be beneficial as part of a holistic approach to reducing overall family stress. Couples therapy and communication skills training could help improve marital satisfaction, which in turn might reduce stress and create a more supportive environment for effective parenting.

9 Limitations and Future Research

9.1 Sample Size and Generalizability

The sample size of this study, while adequate, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to replicate these findings in larger and more diverse samples to enhance the robustness and applicability of the results. Including a more diverse population in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and cultural background could provide a broader understanding of how these factors interact with stress and parenting styles.

9.2 Measurement of Variables

The study relied on self-reported measures, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias. Future studies could incorporate more objective measures of parenting practices and stress, such as observational methods or physiological indicators of stress. For example, using cortisol levels as a biomarker for stress or employing ecological momentary assessment (EMA) to capture real-time data on parenting behaviors could provide more accurate and reliable measures.

9.3 Cross-Sectional Design

The cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the directionality of the relationships between parental stress, marital satisfaction, parenting configuration, and parenting styles. Such studies could provide

insights into how changes in stress levels over time impact parenting behaviours. Additionally, longitudinal research could explore the long-term effects of different parenting styles on child outcomes, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of stress-influenced parenting.

9.4 Additional Factors

Future research should explore additional factors that may interact with or mediate the effects of stress on parenting. For example, social support, parental personality traits, and child temperament could play significant roles in moderating the impact of stress on parenting practices. Investigating how social support networks, such as extended family, friends, and community resources, buffer the effects of stress on parenting could provide valuable insights for designing supportive interventions. Additionally, examining how different personality traits (e. g., resilience, emotional stability) influence parents' responses to stress could help identify those at greater risk for adopting less effective parenting styles.

9.5 Cultural Context

It is also essential to consider the cultural context in which parenting occurs. Cultural norms and values can shape parenting practices and the experience of stress. Future research should explore how cultural differences influence the relationships between stress, marital satisfaction, parenting configuration, and parenting styles. Understanding these cultural nuances could help tailor interventions to be more effective across diverse populations.

9.6 Child Outcomes

Another important avenue for future research is examining the impact of parenting styles influenced by stress on child outcomes. Understanding how different stress-induced parenting behaviours affect children's emotional, behavioural, and academic development can provide a more comprehensive picture of the implications of parental stress. Longitudinal studies tracking children over time could reveal how the interplay between parental stress and parenting styles shapes child development trajectories.

9.7 Intervention Studies

Experimental research testing the efficacy of various stress-reduction interventions on improving parenting practices would provide valuable evidence for practical applications. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) could assess the effectiveness of different intervention strategies, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), and social support enhancement programs, in reducing parental stress and promoting healthier parenting styles. These studies could also explore which interventions are most effective for specific populations or under particular conditions, helping to personalize intervention approaches.

10 Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the impact of parental stress on parenting styles. The consistent finding that parental stress significantly predicts authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles underscores the critical role of stress in shaping parenting behaviours.

These results suggest that interventions aimed at reducing parental stress could potentially promote healthier and more balanced approaches to parenting. While marital satisfaction and parenting configuration did not significantly predict parenting styles in this study, addressing stress remains a vital component in supporting effective parenting practices. Future research should continue to explore the complex dynamics of family life, incorporating a broader range of factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the influences on parenting.

The implications of this study are far-reaching, highlighting the importance of addressing parental stress to foster better parenting practices and ultimately improve child outcomes. By focusing on stress reduction, practitioners can support parents in adopting more effective and nurturing parenting styles, leading to healthier family dynamics and more positive developmental trajectories for children. This study serves as a foundation for further research and intervention development aimed at enhancing the well-being of families through targeted stress reduction strategies.

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