

The Influence of Parental Child-Rearing Styles on Aggressive Behavior in Preschool Children's Peer Interactions

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Abstract. With the continuous improvement of social attention to children's mental health, the aggressive behavior of preschool children (especially at the age of four to six) in peer interaction has gradually become a topic of concern. Such behaviors may not only delay a child's socialization but also adversely affect his or her long-term mental health. This study focuses on the influence of parenting style on aggressive behavior in preschoolers' peer interactions. Based on the parenting theory proposed by Baumrind, this study systematically analyzes the potential association between different parenting types and aggressive behavior. Through the method of literature review, this paper integrates the main research achievements in this field and explores their correlation with children's aggressive behavior from a theoretical perspective. The research results show that there is a significant connection between parents' parenting styles and children's aggressive behaviors. An authoritative parenting style with both high demand and high response characteristics was negatively correlated with lower levels of aggressive behavior. In contrast, authoritarian parenting, which emphasized strict control and obedience, and permissive parenting, which lacked restraint and feedback, were positively associated with higher levels of aggression.

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of the rapid changes of contemporary society, social mental health problems have been paid more and more attention, and children's psychological development has become the focus of attention. The aggressive behavior in childhood is especially alarming because it often impedes the socialization process and healthy development of individuals. In the preschool years, aggression often manifests as verbal abuse, physical conflict, and multiple hostile behaviors in peer interactions. This stage is not only a critical period for children's social and emotional development, but also the family, as their earliest social contact place, also plays a central role in shaping behavior patterns. Therefore, the

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influence of parenting practices on children's behavioral performance has gradually become a hot topic in research.

2 Literature review

Parenting styles refer to the tactics and strategies that caregivers commonly utilize to raise and educate children. They constitute a very consistent behavioral pattern and serve as a description for a variety of parenting actions. Baumrind's classification approach is widely used in academia, categorizing parenting styles as permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and others. Numerous scholars have investigated the relationship between parenting styles and children's aggressive behavior, concluding that authoritative parenting is negatively correlated with children's aggressive behavior, while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are positively correlated [1]. Democratic authoritative parenting styles can reduce children's aggressive behavior, whereas authoritarian and neglectful styles tend to exacerbate such behavior [2]. Additionally, parenting styles are influenced by factors such as educational attainment and family structure, with highly educated parents more likely to adopt democratic authoritative approaches.

Aggressive Behavior in Preschool Children's Peer Interactions: This refers to children intentionally harming others during peer interactions, including actions such as grabbing toys or shoving. Numerous studies have also drawn conclusions regarding aggressive behavior in young children. For instance, the highest incidence of aggressive behavior was observed in 4-year-olds, with boys exhibiting it more frequently than girls, and only children being more prone to aggressive behavior [3]. Aggressive behaviors among preschoolers in small classes are significantly higher than those in medium and large classes, and are associated with insufficient language expression abilities and lack of social experience [4].

Research indicates that parenting styles are closely associated with children's aggressive behaviors. Authoritarian parents reinforce children's aggressive tendencies through harsh punishment, while permissive parents exacerbate children's egocentricity due to a lack of rule-based constraints. In contrast, authoritative parents reduce aggressive behaviors through emotional support and rule-based guidance. For instance, peer interaction skills mediate the relationship between indulgent and authoritarian parenting styles and aggressive behaviors [5].

Previous studies have explored the relationship between parenting styles and children's aggressive behavior, but there remain several issues and shortcomings that require further investigation. For instance, existing studies predominantly employ questionnaire surveys and interviews. However, both the number of interviews conducted and the quantity of questionnaires collected remain limited. Furthermore, the regions where research subjects reside, their age groups, and other factors exhibit certain homogeneity and limitations, meaning the sample lacks strong representativeness. Given existing research indicating a direct association between parental parenting styles and aggressive behavior, this study will focus on preschool children to investigate the influence of parental parenting styles on their aggressive behavior in peer interactions.

3 Core conceptual definitions and theoretical foundations

3.1 Theoretical models of parental child-rearing practices

Baumrind's parenting theory revolves around two core dimensions: responsiveness and demands. Responsiveness gauges the level of parental attention to children's needs and the emotional support offered, whereas demands reflect the degree to which parents regulate their

children's behavior and establish expectations. These dimensions categorize parenting styles into four distinct types: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. Authoritative parenting is regarded as an ideal parenting model that combines high demands with high responsiveness. These parents not only set clear and reasonable rules and boundaries, but also focus on maintaining open communication with their children in a warm and accepting manner. Children who grow up in this environment tend to have stronger emotional regulation ability and are more likely to internalize social norms, thus gradually developing into self-disciplined and responsible individuals. The internal mechanism may lie in the fact that children not only perceive being respected and understood but also are aware of the consequences of their actions, thus being more willing to actively follow the rules. Contrast this with authoritarian parenting, which emphasizes strict control and obedience but lacks emotional responsiveness and two-way communication. Parents often use prescription and even coercive means to demand unconditional compliance with the rules, with little explanation of the reasoning behind the rules or attention to the emotional feelings of the children. Children who have been in this environment for a long time are prone to develop depression, resentment, or rebelliousness, and then manifest higher aggressive behavior, which may be either an imitation of high-pressure control or a negative way of emotional catharsis. Permissive parenting is characterized by high responsiveness and low demand. Parents often treat their children in a forgiving or even *laissez-faire* manner, trying to avoid setting limits or imposing responsibilities, caring but failing to provide the necessary behavioral guidance. In this model, children often lack self-discipline and basic cognition of social boundaries, and may show more impulsive or selfish behaviors in peer interactions. By failing to learn the ability to follow rules and delay gratification, they often face adjustment barriers when entering collective Settings such as kindergarten.

The most negative type of parenting is neglect, which is characterized by the double absence of low demand and low response. Parents did not provide enough emotional support and attention, nor did they establish necessary rules and constraints, and behavioral expectations. Children in this parenting environment are not effectively guided in both emotional cognition and behavioral norms, and are prone to form psychological characteristics of low self-esteem and high anxiety, and the risk of aggressive behavior and social difficulties is significantly higher than that of other groups.

3.2 Definition and manifestations of aggressive behavior in preschool children

Aggressive behavior constitutes undesirable conduct in the social development of preschool children. It refers to actions that intentionally cause physical or psychological harm to others or objects, damage property, and violate social norms and interaction rules. Its core characteristic is "intentionality." The types and developmental characteristics of aggressive behavior are categorized by manifestation: physical aggression, verbal aggression, and relational aggression. Physical aggression is common among younger preschoolers, such as pushing, shoving, or grabbing toys, as they use physical means to achieve their goals due to limited language skills. The incidence of this behavior is higher among younger preschoolers than among middle and older preschoolers [4]. Verbal aggression involves using language to belittle or humiliate others, such as through insults or mockery. Its prevalence increases after age 4 as language skills develop. Relationship attacks involve indirectly undermining peer relationships through tactics such as isolation and spreading rumors. These are common among older preschoolers and are highly covert. Research indicates that preschoolers in small classes exhibit higher frequencies of aggressive behavior than those in medium and large classes [1]. The age of 4 represents a peak incidence period, with physical aggression decreasing by ages 5–6, while verbal and relational aggression increase. Boys demonstrate higher rates of aggressive behavior than girls [3].

4 The influence of parental parenting styles on aggressive behavior in young children

4.1 Direct pathways of different parenting styles

Based on localized research in China, Xie et al. found that authoritative parenting styles showed a significant negative correlation with aggressive behavior in young children, while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles both exhibited a positive correlation with such behavior [1,5]. Further moderation effect analysis revealed that authoritative parenting enhances parental involvement to suppress children's aggressive behavior. In contrast, while authoritarian parenting initially suppresses aggressive behavior, it ultimately increases such behavior over the long term. Zhang Xiaoqiong and Xu et al. also validated the localized applicability of Baumrind's theory in their research [2,6]. The study findings indicate that families employing a democratic authoritative parenting style exhibit the lowest incidence of aggressive behavior among young children. Such households are more receptive to children's reasonable requests while effectively addressing undesirable behaviors, exerting significant positive effects on children's physical and psychological development. In families employing an authoritarian parenting style, parents often project their own aspirations onto their children. This persistent pattern of high demands coupled with low communication fosters rebellious tendencies in young children, significantly increasing the incidence of proactive aggressive behavior. In families practicing permissive parenting, constant protection and micromanagement can lead young children to lack a sense of boundaries. This makes them more prone to reactive aggression when conflicts arise with peers. Furthermore, the interview cases revealed that specific family dynamics in Chinese households—such as “grandparent involvement in childrearing” and “inconsistent parenting styles among parents”—can further undermine the family's “logical consistency,” thereby affecting the effectiveness of parenting approaches [7]. For instance, indulgence from grandparents may also lead to heightened aggressive behavior in young children from authoritarian families, offering a complementary perspective for applying Baumrind's theory within the context of Chinese family culture.

4.2 The role of mediating variables

Regarding the mediating effect between two variables, from the individual perspective, children's self-control abilities are particularly significant. Authoritative parenting can reduce aggressive behavior by enhancing children's self-control. Authoritarian parenting may reduce young children's self-regulation abilities, making those with impulsive tendencies, low self-control, low self-esteem, and unstable extroverted temperaments more prone to aggressive behavior [8]. Xu. et al. found that high sensation-seeking temperament amplifies the impact of strict or permissive parenting styles on aggressive behavior [6]. Secondly, in peer interactions, young children tend to imitate each other's aggressive behaviors, and weak rule enforcement may also encourage such aggression. Children raised under indulgent and permissive parenting styles exhibit higher rates of aggressive behavior, as such parenting approaches weaken children's peer interaction skills, thereby exacerbating aggressive tendencies [1,3,9]. This indicates that peer interaction skills partially mediate the relationship between parenting styles and children's aggressive behavior. Finally, parents' negative emotions may also mediate the influence on children's aggressive behavior, as their emotional states and reactions are transmitted to children through parenting behaviors, becoming one of the factors that trigger aggressive behavior [10].

4.3 Effects of moderating variables

Early childhood aggressive behavior may also be associated with the child's gender, the gender composition of the family (mother, father, girls, and boys), and the family structure in blended families [1,11]. Most studies indicate that boys exhibit significantly higher rates of aggressive behavior than girls, though some research suggests that 2-year-old girls display aggressive behavior more frequently than boys [1]. In multicultural families, the influence of parenting styles on aggressive behavior may be either weakened or strengthened due to conflicts in cultural values.

5 Research implications and practical pathways

5.1 Intervention recommendations at the family education level

First, based on the cases in Bai Lingyu's and Zhang Xiaoqiong's research, where parental misconceptions about child-rearing led to aggressive behavior, it is recommended that parents shift their parenting philosophies [2,4,11]. Citing Feiyuan Fei's research on the correlation between democratic parenting styles and low aggressive behavior, it is recommended that parents focus not only on children's intellectual development but also on their social development and mental health [3]. Referring to Xie Xinran's research on parents' insufficient understanding of aggressive behavior, it is recommended that parents consistently distinguish between the manifestations and causes of three types of aggressive behavior, separating "mischievousness" from genuine aggressive behavior [1]. In conjunction with Zhang Xiaoqiong's recommendations for parents to enhance their own competencies, it is recommended that parents continuously enrich their educational philosophies by reading professional literature [2]. Second, parents are advised to establish appropriate family rules based on the results of several studies showing that permissive and authoritarian parenting are positively associated with aggressive behavior, while authoritative parenting is negatively associated with aggressive behavior. Their approach to education should neither be overly strict nor coddling, nor should it neglect the emotional needs of young children. In view of the parenting disputes caused by grandparents' involvement in child-rearing, as indicated in Zhang Xiaoqiong's research, both parents should employ consistent parenting practices and improve their connections with grandparents [2]. This promotes healthy development in young children. According to Fei Yuanyuan's research, effective parental participation, emotional connection, and emotional communication are also vital [3]. Their parenting techniques should neither be overly strict nor indulgent, nor should parents ignore young children's emotional needs [12]. Second, parents are recommended to establish proper home rules based on the findings of several studies that show that permissive and authoritarian parenting styles have a positive link with aggressive behavior, whereas authoritative parenting methods have a negative correlation.

5.2 Collaborative measures for home-school partnerships

One of the most significant problems nowadays is the lack of communication between family members and the institution of education. According to Bai Lingyu's research, inadequate communication between the home and the school leads to less-than-optimal learning outcomes [4]. It has been suggested that schools and families maintain close touch and consider giving combined parenting education courses. This will increase their potential for collaborative learning. Kindergartens can assist young children in developing their social skills and reducing aggressive tendencies by offering on-site social communication practice courses and personalized educational plans for parents.

6 Conclusion

The findings underscore the critical role of the home environment in mitigating childhood aggression. A household characterized by warmth, unconditional support, and consistent emotional connection provides a foundation for healthy socioemotional development. Effective parental guidance involves a balanced approach that is both firm and compassionate, adaptable yet steady. This authoritative style emphasizes teaching and connection over punitive measures, reframing mistakes as learning opportunities. Furthermore, parents serve as the primary agents in fostering a child's resilience and confidence. By prioritizing effort over perfectionism and celebrating incremental progress, parents can cultivate a growth mindset. Such a nurturing and structured environment is essential for promoting curiosity, self-esteem, and prosocial behavior, ultimately shaping a positive developmental trajectory.

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