

PARENTING STYLES AND ITS IMPACT ON EATING DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the impact of parenting styles on eating disorders and explores the relationship between different parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive—and their influence on the development and maintenance of eating disorders. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how parenting styles can contribute to the risk or resilience of individuals towards eating disorders.

Through an extensive review of existing literature, the findings of this research indicate that parenting styles significantly impact the occurrence and severity of eating disorders. The authoritative parenting style, characterised by high levels of warmth, support, and reasonable control, emerges as a protective factor against the development of eating disorders. Individuals raised in authoritative households tend to exhibit lower levels of disordered eating behaviours, higher self-esteem, and a healthier body image perception.

Conversely, the authoritarian parenting style, characterised by strict rules, high expectations, and low warmth, is associated with an increased risk of developing eating disorders. Individuals raised in authoritarian households are more likely to display higher levels of disordered eating patterns, experience greater body dissatisfaction, and struggle with low self-esteem.

Similarly, the permissive parenting style, characterised by low control and few rules, is also linked to a higher risk of eating disorders. Individuals raised in permissive households tend to demonstrate higher levels of impulsivity, reduced self-control, and increased vulnerability to societal pressures regarding body image.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of parenting styles in shaping individuals' vulnerability to eating disorders. The findings underscore the importance of promoting authoritative parenting practices to reduce the risk of eating disorders and emphasise the need for parental education programs and interventions. Such interventions can equip parents

with the knowledge and skills necessary to foster healthy attitudes towards food, body image, and self-esteem in their children.

Keywords : Parenting styles , Anorexia nervosa , Bulimia nervosa , Authoritative parenting , Authoritarian parenting , Permissive parenting

INTRODUCTION

Good parenting refers to the consistent and nurturing care provided by parents or caregivers to promote the well-being, growth, and development of their children. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to parenting, several principles are generally considered essential for effective and positive parenting. Good parents provide a safe and loving environment where their children feel accepted, supported, and loved, regardless of their strengths, weaknesses, or mistakes. Setting clear and age-appropriate boundaries helps children understand expectations and develop self-discipline. Consistent and fair discipline methods, such as positive reinforcement, logical consequences, and time-outs, help children learn responsibility and appropriate behaviour.

Good parents communicate openly and honestly with their children, listening attentively to their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. Encouraging dialogue, respecting their opinions, and providing guidance when necessary builds trust and strengthens the parent-child bond. Recognizing and validating a child's emotions, even if they are difficult or challenging, helps them develop emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Good parents provide a safe space for their children to express their feelings and offer comfort and support during times of stress or difficulty.

While providing support and guidance, good parents also foster their children's independence and self-reliance. They encourage age-appropriate decision-making, problem-solving, and responsibility, allowing children to develop confidence and a sense of competence. Consistency and predictability: Children thrive in an environment with consistent routines, rules, and expectations. Good parents establish predictable schedules, follow through on commitments, and provide a stable foundation that helps children feel secure.

Parents are role models for their children, and good parents demonstrate positive behaviour, values, and attitudes in their own lives. They teach important life skills, such as kindness, empathy, respect, and responsibility, by embodying these qualities themselves. Promoting a balanced lifestyle: Good parents encourage a balanced approach to life, fostering physical, emotional, social, and intellectual well-being. They promote healthy habits, including proper nutrition, regular exercise, adequate sleep, and a healthy work-life balance.

It's important to note that no parent is perfect, and there will be challenges along the way. Good parenting is an ongoing process that requires patience, understanding, and continuous learning.

Seeking support, advice, and resources when needed can also be beneficial for both parents and children.

Parenting can have an impact on the development of eating disorders, although it is important to note that eating disorders are complex mental health conditions influenced by multiple factors. Here are some ways in which parenting can be connected to eating disorders:

The family environment plays a crucial role in a child's development, including their relationship with food and body image. If there is an emphasis on weight, appearance, or dieting within the family, it can contribute to the development of negative body image and disordered eating behaviours. Parental attitudes and behaviours: Parents who exhibit unhealthy attitudes or behaviours toward food, weight, or body image can unintentionally pass them on to their children. For example, parents who excessively diet, comment negatively on their own or others' bodies, or engage in disordered eating patterns may influence their children's beliefs and behaviours.

The way parents communicate about food, weight, and body image can shape their children's attitudes and behaviours. Messages that emphasise restrictive eating, weight control, or body dissatisfaction can increase the risk of developing disordered eating patterns. Children who do not receive consistent emotional support, validation, and nurturing from their parents may develop coping mechanisms, including disordered eating, as a way to deal with emotional distress or seek control over their lives.

Parents serve as role models for their children. If parents engage in disordered eating behaviours or have distorted body image perceptions, their children may internalise these patterns and develop similar behaviours. It is important to note that these factors do not directly cause eating disorders, but they can contribute to the development of disordered eating attitudes and behaviours. Eating disorders are complex conditions influenced by a combination of genetic, biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors. Professional help from healthcare providers, therapists, and support networks is essential in understanding and addressing eating disorders.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parenting styles play a pivotal role in shaping the development and well-being of adolescents. One specific area of interest is the impact of parenting styles on the occurrence and severity of eating disorders. Unhealthy parenting practices, such as those characterised by low or high levels of control, have been found to significantly influence an adolescent's vulnerability to developing eating disorders.

Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, are complex psychological conditions that involve disturbances in eating behaviours, body image perception, and weight control. The impact of parenting styles on these disorders has been extensively studied, with authoritarian parenting, neglectful parenting, and ineffective parenting emerging as key factors.

Authoritarian parenting, characterised by strict rules, high expectations, and low warmth, can have both positive and negative impacts on adolescent eating behaviours. On the positive side, clear rules and boundaries may instil discipline and self-control, promoting healthy eating habits. However, the negative impacts of authoritarian parenting are more prevalent, as excessive control and pressure can contribute to body dissatisfaction, unhealthy weight control practices, and an increased risk of eating disorders.

Neglectful parenting, characterised by a lack of emotional involvement and support, can also have detrimental effects on an adolescent's eating behaviours. The absence of guidance and attention leaves adolescents vulnerable to external societal pressures, leading to the adoption of unhealthy eating patterns and a higher risk of developing eating disorders.

Parenting styles exist on a spectrum, with authoritative parenting falling in the middle, incorporating elements of both control and support. This parenting style has consistently been associated with positive outcomes, including a reduced risk of eating disorders. Authoritative parents provide structure and guidance while also fostering open communication, leading to a healthier body image, positive self-esteem, and balanced eating habits.

Ineffective parenting practices, regardless of the specific style, can trigger negative consequences for adolescent eating behaviours. Inconsistency, overindulgence, or neglect can disrupt the formation of healthy eating habits and exacerbate body dissatisfaction.

These unhealthy parenting practices can have consequential effects on adolescents' overall well-being, affecting not only their physical health but also their mental and emotional states. The development of eating disorders can lead to serious medical complications, psychological distress, and impaired social functioning.

Connecting the dots between parenting styles, eating disorders, and substance abuse, research has also identified a correlation between certain parenting styles and increased risk of substance abuse in adolescents. Authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles have been associated with higher rates of substance use, as they may contribute to feelings of rebellion, poor self-esteem, and a lack of effective coping mechanisms.

Understanding the influence of parenting styles on eating disorders and related outcomes is crucial for developing targeted prevention and intervention strategies. By promoting

authoritative parenting practices, fostering open communication, and providing education and support to parents, it is possible to mitigate the risk of eating disorders and promote healthier outcomes for adolescents.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research paper examined the relationship between parenting styles and their impact on eating disorders. The findings revealed that parenting styles play a significant role in the development and maintenance of eating disorders among individuals. The three main parenting styles explored in this study—authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive—were associated with distinct outcomes regarding eating disorder symptoms and risk factors.

Firstly, the authoritative parenting style, characterised by high levels of warmth, support, and reasonable control, was found to be protective against the development of eating disorders. Individuals raised in authoritative households exhibited lower levels of disordered eating behaviours, higher self-esteem, and better body image perception.

Conversely, the authoritarian parenting style, characterised by strict rules, high expectations, and low warmth, was associated with an increased risk of developing eating disorders. Such individuals were more likely to exhibit disordered eating patterns, experience body dissatisfaction, and struggle with low self-esteem.

Similarly, the permissive parenting style, characterised by low control and few rules, was also linked to a higher risk of eating disorders. Individuals raised in permissive households showed higher levels of impulsivity, less self-control, and increased vulnerability to societal pressures regarding body image.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. Firstly, the study relied predominantly on self-report measures, which are subject to biases and may not accurately capture participants' experiences. Additionally, the research focused primarily on adolescent and young adult populations, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other age groups. Furthermore, the study did not account for potential confounding variables, such as genetic predispositions or peer influences, which could also contribute to the development of eating disorders.

Qualitatively, this research underscores the importance of parental influence on the development of eating disorders. It highlights the need for parents to strike a balance between setting appropriate boundaries and providing emotional support to foster healthy eating habits and positive body image in their children. Further qualitative research can delve deeper into the lived experiences of individuals with eating disorders and their relationships with their parents,

shedding light on the underlying mechanisms and dynamics at play.

From a future perspective, these findings have several implications. Firstly, they emphasise the significance of incorporating parenting interventions and education programs into preventive measures for eating disorders. By equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to promote healthy attitudes towards food and body image, it may be possible to mitigate the risk of developing eating disorders in vulnerable individuals. Additionally, future research could explore the long-term effects of different parenting styles on eating disorder recovery and relapse rates to provide more comprehensive treatment strategies.

In conclusion, this research highlights the critical role of parenting styles in shaping individuals' susceptibility to eating disorders. While authoritative parenting offers protection against eating disorders, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles contribute to increased risk. By addressing the limitations, conducting further qualitative investigations, and implementing parenting interventions, we can enhance our understanding and potentially develop effective preventive and therapeutic approaches for individuals at risk of or struggling with eating disorders.

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