

# Relationship between Parenting Style and Mental Health among the Female Adolescents in Tabuk City, KSA

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## Abstract

Parents are the most powerful instruments in promoting good mental health. This study examined the relationship between parenting style and the mental health of female adolescents in Tabuk, KSA. The study employed a correlational methodology, using Convenience Sampling of 100 participants. Standardized questionnaires of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale and Measure of Parental Style were distributed. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21.0. Majority of the respondents belong to 20 years of age (26%), were first- year students (34 %), from a nuclear family (77%) with five to six siblings (27%) and in the income bracket 15,000-25,000 SAR (25%). Parents were over controlling (maternal [73%] and paternal [65%]). There was a high rate of mental health problems among female adolescents, represented by anxiety (25%), stress (20%) and depression (18%).

**Keywords:** Parenting Style, Mental Health, Adolescents, Saudi student nurses

## Introduction

Allied healthcare professionals like nurses, medical technologists and physical therapists are dispensers of care, compassion and service. Keeping healthy, both mental and physical, is essential to ensure that they perform work at their very best. They are role models, therefore possessing a sound mind can have a powerful effect on those around them and allow them to express themselves and their teachings creatively and intelligently<sup>1</sup>.

As early as childhood, the seed of good mental health is rooted. In fostering good mental health in the

lives of their children, parents are the most important catalysts. Parents' upbringing and child-rearing styles are the critical factors in changing and stabilizing the behavioral problems of children; similarly, the foundation of self-esteem is laid early in life<sup>2</sup>.

Adolescence is one of the critical stages that a person goes through because several changes may enhance personal refinement either positively or negatively. Adolescents refine their sense of self, and if they accomplish this, they can stay true to themselves and what they believe. The vital event in this stage is forming a social relationship<sup>3</sup>. Children's behavioral issues are said to be mainly caused by the parental nurturing style. It was reported that some adolescents suffer from various health issues caused by insensible, pretentious behavior and unbearable words by parents<sup>4</sup>. The bond a parent shares with their children is deep, important and meaningful.

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Baumrind identified three different parenting styles namely: Authoritative parenting, uninvolved parenting, and Indifferent parenting. He further expanded the model using permissive parenting and neglectful parenting<sup>5</sup>. Neglectful parenting is associated with children involved in drug or alcohol abuse and delinquency as well as has impulsive behavior including suicide<sup>6</sup>.

Mental health is a state of complete well-being in physical, mental and social aspects and not only the absence of illness or infirmity<sup>7</sup>. Adolescents with improved mental well-being are mentally happier and exhibit more socially positive habits<sup>7</sup>.

Depression is a pervasive and severe medical condition that triggers feelings of sadness and/or lack of interest in activities<sup>8</sup>. Anxiety is characterized by feelings of stress, anxiety and physical changes. Physical signs such as sweating, shaking, dizziness or a quick pulse can also be present<sup>9</sup>.

Rapid changes happen in the human life of adolescence and parents play important role<sup>10</sup>.

### **Related Studies**

Saudi Arabia (SA) has a population exceeding 27 million, and 20% of its population are adolescents aged 10–19 years with an average monthly income for Saudi families, amounted to SAR 14, 820 SAR<sup>11</sup>. The mental health challenges impose an immense burden on the largest generation of young people in history affecting 10-20 % of adolescents suffering from mental problems with 80% cases of depression<sup>7</sup>.

In one research, there was a significant relationship between parenting styles and depressive symptom<sup>12</sup>, authoritarian parenting and mental health<sup>13</sup> and maternal parenting style dimensions and mental health using the Measure of Parental style (MOPS) and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress

Scale (DASS)<sup>14</sup>. Authoritarian parenting is a critical factor that affects gifted children's well-being and their mental health<sup>15</sup>. In China, paternal emotional warmth could decrease adolescents' social anxiety, whereas maternal overprotection could increase it<sup>16</sup>.

On the contrary, social anxiety negatively correlated with the permissive style of parenting<sup>17</sup>. In Norway, support, monitoring and neglect have no significant difference between 253 adolescents 12–18 years of age in their perception of parenting styles<sup>18</sup>. In Saudi Arabia, the average prevalence of mental illness was 15.5% in 2009<sup>19</sup>. The role of parents' behavior in maintaining the mental health of their children is important. The relationship between these two elements is a very important aspect because of the impact it has on the child's behavior, personality and actions, so we find that this is a valid reason for researchers' interest in this aspect. The present study addressed the significant gap in the current health literature by conducting an analysis of data from female adolescents enrolled in one university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Based on the Baumrind's parenting style model, the researchers hypothesized that there is a relationship between the perceived parenting style of the adolescents' parents and their mental health<sup>20</sup>.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This is a cross-sectional descriptive correlation study design which aimed at describing the perceived parenting styles as well as the female adolescents' mental health. Correlation design is used to determine if there is a relationship between the parenting styles and the mental health of the adolescents.

### **Respondents and Sampling**

Convenience sampling is one of the nonprobability sampling methods employed when there is a group of people easy to contact or reach. The respondents were

100 adolescent female students from Saudi Arabia, including first-, second-, third- and fourth-year nursing, medical laboratory technology and physical therapy students.

### **Instruments**

#### **DASS**

Two standardized questionnaires were used in data gathering. First, the DASS, a 21-item self-report instrument developed to measure three concepts (depression, anxiety and tension/stress)<sup>21</sup>. The depression scale assesses dysphoria, hopelessness, and devaluation of life, self-deprecation, and a lack of interest/involvement, anhedonia and inertia. The anxiety scale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. The stress scale is sensitive to chronic nonspecific arousal level. Scores for the mentioned concepts are calculated by summing the scores for the relevant items. The recommended cut-off scores for conventional severity labels (normal, moderate, severe) are as follows. Table 1 show the scores of the DASS-21, which will need to be multiplied by 2 to calculate the final score.

#### **MOPS**

The second questionnaire is the MOPS, a 15-item instrument with three subscales (parental indifference, abuse and over control). This instrument was developed to address some shortcomings in the Parental Bonding Instrument<sup>22</sup>. It is a self-administered tool used to measure styles of perceived parenting to obtain a total score for each category by adding up the scores of responses to items in each of the three categories.

#### **Procedure**

Administrative clearance to conduct the study was secured from the university's Ethics Committee.

Questionnaires were distributed to the 100 female adolescent students. The researchers made sure they were present on the appointment day of the floating of the questionnaires to the respondents of the study for easy access on any clarifications or queries that may be raised. The data collectors gave a brief introduction to the respondents by explaining the aims and purpose of the study, and written consent was obtained from all the respondents.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Data gathered from the respondents were coded, tallied and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 21.0). Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the demographic profile data of the respondents and parenting styles. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to measure the strength of the linear association between the two variables: the parenting style and the mental health of the participants.

### **Results**

Among the 100 respondents, 53 (53%) were nursing students, 35 (35%) were medical laboratory students, and 12 (12%) were physical therapy students. Most of the students were female nursing students because they represent the largest number of female students. The biggest population came from 26 years old (26%) first-year students (34%). Majority of the students came of families that earn 15,000–20,000 SAR (25%)—which is close to the average monthly income for Saudi families (14,820 SAR)<sup>11</sup>. Common among respondents have 5–6 siblings or 27% coming from 77% nuclear family as shown in (Table 2).

The perceived parenting style used by the mothers of the respondents varied. Predominantly, there are 72% students with over controlling mothers, and 65% over controlling fathers (Table 3).

This study revealed a high prevalence of mental health issues among the respondents. It is alarming to note 20% were experiencing stress; 26%, anxiety; and 18%, depression. There was no correlation observed between the maternal parenting style and the mental health of female adolescents. Taking a p-value < .05 as significant, with stress, the p-value was .246343;

anxiety, the p-value was .243509; and depression, with a p-value of .120, making them insignificant. On the other hand, with the paternal parenting style, there was no correlation with female adolescents, considering stress (P = .111). A significant positive correlation was observed with anxiety (P = .015) and depression (P = .035).

**Table 1.***Scoring Mental Health by DASS Questionnaire*

|                  | depression | anxiety | stress |
|------------------|------------|---------|--------|
| Normal           | 0-9        | 0-7     | 0-14   |
| Mild             | 10-13      | 8-9     | 15-18  |
| Moderate         | 14-20      | 10-14   | 19-25  |
| Sever            | 21-27      | 15-19   | 26-33  |
| Extremely severe | 28+        | 20+     | 34+    |

**Table 2***Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

|                    | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------|------------|
| <i>Course</i>      |        |            |
| Nursing            | 53     | 53         |
| Medical Laboratory | 35     | 35         |
| Physical Therapy   | 12     | 12         |
| Total              | 100    | 100        |
| <i>Age</i>         |        |            |
| 18                 | 22     | 22         |
| 19                 | 18     | 18         |
| 20                 | 26     | 26         |
| 21                 | 24     | 24         |
| 22                 | 10     | 10         |
| Total              | 100    | 100        |
| <i>Year level</i>  |        |            |
| First year         |        |            |
| Preparatory        | 34     | 34         |
| Second year        | 23     | 23         |
| Third year         | 14     | 14         |

|                           |     |     |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|
| Fourth year               | 29  | 29  |
| Total                     | 100 | 100 |
| <hr/>                     |     |     |
| <i>Socio-economic</i>     |     |     |
| < 5000 SAR                | 17  | 17  |
| 5000-10,000 SAR           | 24  | 24  |
| 10,001-15,000 SAR         | 20  | 20  |
| 15,000-20,000SAR          | 25  | 25  |
| 20,000-25,000SAR          | 8   | 8   |
| 25,000SAR&>               | 6   | 6   |
| Total                     | 100 | 100 |
| <hr/>                     |     |     |
| <i>Number of Siblings</i> |     |     |
| 0                         | 1   | 1   |
| 1-2                       | 7   | 7   |
| 3-4                       | 22  | 22  |
| 5-6                       | 27  | 27  |
| 7-8                       | 22  | 22  |
| 9-10                      | 12  | 12  |
| 10 &>                     | 9   | 9   |
| Total                     | 100 | 100 |
| <hr/>                     |     |     |
| <i>Types of Family</i>    |     |     |
| Nuclear family            | 77  | 77  |
| Divorced family           | 5   | 5   |
| Single parent             | 6   | 6   |
| Extended family           | 4   | 4   |
| Step families             | 2   | 2   |
| Immigrant family          | 2   | 2   |
| Grand parent              | 2   | 2   |

|                 |     |     |
|-----------------|-----|-----|
| Single state    | 1   | 1   |
| Beanpole        | 1   | 1   |
| Cohabiting      | 0   | 0   |
| Communal family | 0   | 0   |
| Total           | 100 | 100 |

**Table 3**  
*Parenting Style*

| <i>Maternal Parenting Style</i> |                 | Number     | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------|------------|
|                                 | No Indifference | 24         | 24         |
|                                 | Abusive         | 4          | 4          |
|                                 | Over control    | 72         | 72         |
|                                 | Total           | 100        | 100        |
| <i>Paternal Parenting Style</i> |                 |            |            |
|                                 | No Indifference | 33         | 32         |
|                                 | Abusive         | 2          | 2          |
|                                 | Over control    | 65         | 65         |
|                                 | Total           | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

## Discussion

In this study, the researchers examined how perceived parenting style and mental health are correlated with a population of female adolescents. Majority of the students are 20 years old who have a remarkable ability to regulate their self-esteem<sup>9</sup> and if they are not thriving, may develop mental illness<sup>21</sup>. The current study revealed a comparable result where high school participants from 18 to 19 have a high rate of mental health problems related to the parenting styles<sup>13</sup> like in another study in Abha, KSA where 17 years old revealed high rate of mental health problems too<sup>19</sup>. This study has bridged the gap by including medical students as participants, compared to most of the searched related studies, which involved only

preschools, elementary schools and high schools<sup>19</sup>. In one study, it revealed that parents with lower socioeconomic status did not have enough time and energy to meet their children's attachment needs, resulting in emotional neglect<sup>24</sup> and use of discipline and harsh parenting with the family earnings of 5,000–10,000 SAR range<sup>15</sup>.

Saudi families are traditionally patrilineal and patrilocal. The whole extended family has historically lived together as a tribe or clan. However, due to rapid urbanization over the last few decades, the nuclear family arrangement has become more traditional. Arab families are known for having a large number of children, ranging from 5–10<sup>19</sup> compared to a 73% composition of 5–10 family members or siblings

yielding a positive relationship with mental health<sup>23</sup>.

The Arab society is mostly patriarchal. The father is considered the head of households. Men have the most control and are responsible for the primary income of the family and its security and safety. Females are responsible for the domestic space and are expected to look after their husbands. Today, sharing financial control of the household is typical for both men and women. Many Saudi families now also have domestic employees depending on the family's financial capacity and size<sup>23</sup>.

Both Saudi parents in this study are over controlling. Over controlling parents are rigid and has strict set of guidelines they expect the child to<sup>6,24</sup>. Adolescents under stress and suffering from anxiety and depression have these mental health problems associated with over controlling parents. They usually show signs that include changes in behavior and conduct, like overreacting, emotional vulnerability, difficulty in relating with peers, changes in the way they think about themselves, low self-esteem, negative thoughts, and so forth. This finding is incongruent where emotional warmth and overprotection were significantly more often perceived from mothers than from fathers<sup>15</sup>.

The high prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression in this study is depressing and is attributed to the paternal parenting style, which was responsible for about 15.5% of mental health problems<sup>19</sup>; social anxiety among children<sup>26,27,28</sup>, authoritarian (over control) and more depressive behavior<sup>26</sup>, depression and anxiety<sup>16</sup>. Family functioning can also influence children's social anxiety<sup>29, 30</sup>. Overprotection and unnecessary interference were more likely to raise the social anxiety of children<sup>31,32</sup>.

On the other hand, the current findings negate existing research that indicates mothers' overprotection increases children's social anxiety<sup>32</sup>

and maternal overprotection is related to general anxiety<sup>4, 33</sup> and social anxiety; the indifference parenting style is related with stress; and the abusive parenting style with stress, anxiety and depression, leaving abuse and stress with the paternal parenting style<sup>4</sup>. The emotional warmth of fathers can minimize the social anxiety of teenagers, while maternal overprotection can increase it<sup>16</sup>. The results of this study support that mothers play a significant role in adolescents' mental health in the KSA, but fathers have a more substantial influence in the development of mental health problems<sup>27, 34</sup> where mothers play a significant role and fathers play a moderately more critical role. Significantly, in Arab countries, where the father is the critical provider of family income in general, the fathers expend more time and energy coping with work mobility and uncertainty, leaving them with little time and opportunity to engage with their children or demonstrate their appreciation and emotional warmth through authoritative styles of parenting. In a traditional family, Arab fathers also have a higher status, are considered to be the head of the family and are to be revered and obeyed by all family members.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the female adolescents of one university in KSA, reported a high rate of mental health problems, and the majority of the maternal and paternal parenting styles experienced were over controlling. A significant relationship was seen only between the father's parenting style and the mental health (depression and anxiety) of the participants.

Parenting style is a crucial foundation toward good and positive mental health. Mental health represents one of the major health issues affecting adolescents, yet the provision of mental services is weak at present<sup>19</sup>. Students from allied health sciences need to have better knowledge and a deep awareness of their

mental health so they can be efficient and effective in rendering care through concentration, communication, time management and critical thinking to make the correct judgment. The allied healthcare educators need to be knowledgeable about assessing students with mental health problems so as to determine those with problems at an early stage and offer solutions or treatments to deal with such problems. Parents need to be aware and be educated about ways of healthy parenting and mental health problems in children. Healthy parenting practices include listening to children; having conversations with them about the details of their day, solving the problems they face; providing positive motivation; and being good role models. General practitioners and other primary care providers need to educate the community about the importance of parenting styles that should be built on respect; love and logical punishment when children make mistakes to help parents better engage the youth, to recognize mental health problems and to deliver simple treatments, including supportive counseling and behavior therapy. Finally, future researchers need to conduct further research to broaden the scope on what works best for society and different cultures. These studies may identify the parenting style that yields the best result for mental health.

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