

## **Relationship between Parenting Styles and Self Compassion in Young Adults**

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The present study explored the relationship between parenting styles and self compassion in young adults. A total sample of 116 participants including 66 females and 50 males were selected from different universities of Karachi city through convenient sampling. Consent form, demographic form, Parental Authority Questionnaire (Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Kazem, Alzubiadi, & Al-Bahrani, 2011) and Self Compassion Scale (Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht, 2011) were administered. Analysis revealed non-significant relationship between parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian and permissive) and self compassion. However multiple regression analysis of parenting styles and subscales of self compassion showed significant relationship between permissive parenting styles and isolation. Other factors that might have a significant effect on the levels of self compassion are discussed. Limitations and suggestions for future studies are also mentioned.

*Keywords.* Parenting styles, authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, self compassion

Parenting style is “a combination of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and create an emotional climate in which the parents’ behaviors are expressed and the child’s behavior is influenced” (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Therefore, parental attitude is not a single element, rather a multifaceted dimension which has a significant influence on a child. Baumrind (1971), after extensive field work with parents and children, put forward an elaborate theory shedding light upon parenting styles. In her Parenting Styles Model (1971), she emphasized two major divisions of child rearing styles namely responsiveness and demandingness. Interaction between these two basic divisions results in one of the three popular parenting styles namely permissive, authoritarian and authoritative. Operational

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definition for parenting styles model (Baumrind, 1971) is rooted in the two major divisions of demandingness and responsiveness. Permissive style is high on responsiveness but low on demandingness. An authoritarian style of parenting is low on responsiveness but high on demandingness. And lastly an authoritative style is high on responsiveness and also on demandingness.

Researchers have shown that parenting styles have a considerable impact on the functioning of a child. Erden and Uredi (2008) found that eighth graders who came from authoritative parenting homes adopted learning strategies that were 'self regulated'. Heaven and Ciarrochi (2008) researched on self esteem of high school students. They discovered that students who received an authoritative parenting style had higher self esteem and those who received an authoritarian parenting style had lower self esteem. Schier (2008) mentions that the authoritative parenting style has been said to result in the healthiest outcomes.

The construct of parenting styles has been researched upon extensively, the reason being that it exerts considerable influence on an individual (Huta, 2011). However, only a handful of studies have explored its relationship with self compassion.

Self compassion might seem new, but it is approximately 2500 years old (Lopez, 2009). The concept has been utilized by Buddhism, to be kind and accepting to others and to the self (Gilbert, 2010). Self-compassion is defined in terms of more general definition of compassion, itself. According to this definition when individual feels compassion for others they are touched by another's experience of suffering and it leads to the spontaneous feelings of kindness and care for the person's welfare. When compassion feelings arise for someone who made mistake or performed a misdeed, an open-minded, non-judgmental attitude towards the individual as opposed to have harsh criticism or severe judgment, is taken (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

In the same way, self compassion towards oneself is to be open and aware of one's own suffering, offer kindness and understanding towards oneself, desire of self's well-being, to take a nonjudgmental attitude towards one's inadequacies and failures, and frame one's own experience in light of the common human experience (Neff, 2003a).

Alongside parenting styles, the degree of self compassion practiced by individuals when faced with an emotional turmoil was explored by the current study. Being kind to others is a well understood and acknowledged phenomenon. When an individual's

sufferings are met with a sense of consideration, understanding and concern from others, the concept can be defined as compassion (Gilbert, 2005).

Neff's operational definition of self compassion involves polar opposite components namely self kindness against self judgment, common humanity against isolation and mindfulness against over-identification (Neff & Germer, 2012).

The social mentality theory put forward by Gilbert (1989) highlights the theoretical framework of self compassion (Grey, 2009). Gilbert and Irons (2005), state that a self-self relationship is developed when an infant receives warmth and care from the primary caregiver. The relationship with self will be based on the internalized relationship with significant others (parents).

Buddhism is known to be dominant in the Eastern side of the world. However, not every Eastern society has eagerly embraced self compassionate attitudes. A study conducted by Neff et al (2008) compared the differences in self compassion in Taiwan, Thailand and United States. According to the results Thailand, being a Buddhism dominated country, would have greater levels of self compassionate attitudes. Taiwan on the other hand, influenced by the teachings of Confucius (Zhang, 2003) would have lower levels of self compassion. Confucianism involves instilling shame for moral development in an individual (DeVos, 1998). Parents in Taiwan adopted a style tinted with criticism to promote morality (Fung & Chen, 2001). Additionally it was discovered that United States had moderate amounts of self compassionate attitudes. Moreover levels of self compassion are not only based on the prevalent teachings but also on the parenting style.

Only a handful of researches have explored the link between parenting styles and its impact on individuals. Kausar and Shafique (2008) explored the relationship between authority of parents and emotional adjustment in Pakistan. Results of their study showed that females in Rawalpindi were more likely to report their parents as being authoritative and were better adjusted emotionally as compared to males (Kausar & Shafique, 2008). Bowlby's Attachment Theory helps explain the link between parental attitudes and a child's emotional well being. He emphasized that a secure attachment with the caregiver allows a child to be emotionally better adjusted. Additionally he focused on a balance between responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs of a child (Bowlby, 1988).

The Symbolic Interactionism theory (Mead, 1934) connects parenting styles to self compassion. The theory states that an

individual is a product of socialization and sees self as a reflection of how they are treated by others. Parental attitudes and perceptions may thus be internalized and affect the level of self compassion in an individual.

This study aims to explore the relationship between parenting styles and self compassion. The knowledge that a certain parenting style is prevalent can be useful in identifying the impact it has on self compassionate attitudes on their children, in their adult life. Presumably in Pakistan no researches have made a link between self compassion and parenting styles. Hence current study will help make connection between the two constructs can help promote a positive style of parent that cultivates self compassionate attitudes.

With relevance to the above literature review and rationale, it is hypothesized that there would be a significant relationship between parenting styles and self compassion in young adults.

## Method

### *Participants*

Convenient sampling was used to select 116 participants (females=66 and males=50) from different universities of Karachi city, between the ages of 18-30 years. All participants were enrolled in different undergraduate and graduate programs.

### *Measures*

**Demographic Form.** The demographic form was utilized to collect information about gender, age, number of siblings, birth order, education, family structure and relationship status.

**Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ).** Parental Authority Questionnaire- Short version (PAQ) was used to measure parenting styles (Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Kazem, Alzubiadi, & Al-Bahrani, 2011). It is a self report measure and is based on Baumrind's Parenting Styles Model (Baumrind, 1971). The concurrent validity of the scale with the long version was highly significant ( $p < .001$ ).

The questionnaire consists of 20 items with a five point likert scale; strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. The questionnaire has three subscales namely authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting. Seven items each represent an authoritative and authoritarian parenting style while six items represent a permissive parenting style. None of the items required

reverse scoring. Recommended scoring is based on computation of mean score of each subscale.

**Self-Compassion Scale (SCS).** Self Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS) was used to measure self compassion (Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht, 2011). It is a self report measure and is based on Neff's conceptualization of self compassion (Neff, 2003a). The internal consistency of the SCS came out to be .86 while its correlation with the long form was .97. The short version is considered to be a reliable and valid alternative to the long form, preferably for the overall self compassion scores.

The questionnaire consists of 12 items with a five point likert scale; 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). The questionnaire consists of six subscales namely self kindness, self judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness and over-identification. Each subscale is represented by two items. Out of the 12 items, 6 are reverse scored. The items representing self judgment, isolation and over identification are reverse scored. Recommended scoring is based on computation of overall mean of the self compassion score.

### **Procedure**

After taking permission from different universities concerned authorities' participants were approached individually. After taking consent from the participants, demographic form was administered. In addition, the participants were informed that they can get in touch with the researcher for their individual results and collective results of the research. The two questionnaires were administered on the participants after providing them with instructions. The participants were thanked for their participation. The results were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

### **Results**

The hypothesis was tested using Pearson product moment correlation to find out the significance of relationship between the variables. The results for participants ( $N = 116$ ) were analyzed for the total self compassion mean against each of the three parenting styles variables.

Results showed nonsignificant relationship between an authoritative (.052), authoritarian (-.049) and permissive parenting styles (-.157) and self compassion.

Table 1

*Multiple Regression Analysis of Parenting Styles and Subscales of Self Compassion*

Criterion Variable		$\beta$	$t$	$p$
<b>Self Kindness</b>	(Constant)		4.460	.000
	Authoritative	.037	.398	.692
	Authoritarian	-.008	-.082	.935
	Permissive	.128	1.362	.176
<b>Common Humanity</b>	(Constant)		5.090	.000
	Authoritative	.033	.347	.730
	Authoritarian	.028	.295	.769
	Permissive	-.111	-1.172	.244
<b>Mindfulness</b>	(Constant)		3.597	.000
	Authoritative	.096	1.025	.308
	Authoritarian	.094	1.000	.320
	Permissive	-.051	-.537	.592
<b>Self Judgment</b>	(Constant)		6.241	.000
	Authoritative	.037	.406	.685
	Authoritarian	-.155	-1.679	.096
	Permissive	-.175	-1.901	.060
<b>Isolation</b>	(Constant)		4.489	.000
	Authoritative	.016	.176	.860
	Authoritarian	.059	.637	.526
	Permissive	-.211	-2.267	.025*
<b>Over Identification</b>	(Constant)		5.977	.000
	Authoritative	-.037	-.396	.693
	Authoritarian	-.142	-1.514	.133
	Permissive	-.049	-.518	.606

\* $p < .05$ .

Although non significant relationship exists between parenting styles and self compassion, however above table (Table 1) shows a significant relationship between permissive parenting style ( $p < .025$ ) and isolation. Additionally permissive parenting and self judgment share a slightly non significant relationship ( $p < .060$ ).

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between parenting styles and self compassion in young adults. Findings show that there exists no relationship between parenting styles and self compassion. Although previous research work has shown a positive relationship between parenting styles and a positive attitude towards self (Irons et al, 2006), self esteem (Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008), self

efficacy (Erden & Uredi, 2008), self concept (Coopersmith, 1967) and the like, the current study has shown otherwise.

Among factors that influence the interaction effects of parenting styles and self compassion, religion is an important factor (Ghorbani et al, 2011). Parents have an unquestionably respectable and exalted stature in Islam. Since a very young age children are taught not to put forward questions to their parents and behave in an obedient manner. Carter (1999) stated that conformity is an important element for Muslims. The concept of obedience and conformity in Islam can be knitted with parenting styles and self compassion using the symbolic interactionism theory. The previously mentioned theory of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) explains how an individual sees self as a reflection of how they are treated by others. A Muslim child is likely to accept the incoming attitudes from parents in a similar manner as they accept religious values. Instead of internalizing criticism that might have an impact on their self compassionate attitude, they accept it as a part of broader religious framework.

Cultural variation is another factor that helps understand the non significant results of the current research between parenting styles and self compassion. Previous work on cultural variations have shown that self compassion differences arise from culture-specific elements rather than differences based on Eastern and Western societies (Neff et al, 2008). In Pakistan, it is a cultural trend to adopt a critical attitude towards children to instill obedience towards the authority figure. This trend of critical parenting styles is separated from the aforementioned religious influences by the idea of parental ethno theory. Parental ethno theory is the term provided by Harkness and Super (1992) to describe the practices that parents adopts based on their own experiences with the culture and the society. Julian et al (1994) also mentioned that parents tend to develop their own theories of parenting based on interaction with society and the culture at large.

Additionally, non significant results between parenting styles and self compassion can be explained through the concept of self compassion. Neff (2003b), author of the self compassion scale, stated how a self compassionate attitude serves as a nurturing and warm parent (Tartakovsky, 2012). An individual might be capable of treating self with compassion in the face of an adversity without warmth and support from parents. Because of a self compassionate attitude towards self, one might be capable of filling the void of warmth and support from external sources. Hence, self compassion can be viewed as a purely self initiated and maintained concept.

Moreover the attachment theorist, Bowlby, after extensively working with children mentioned that early parent child interaction is not deterministic of the lifelong development of an individual. Based on the work of Bowlby, it can be said that one's self compassionate attitude is subject to change (Bowlby, 1988). Regardless of the parenting style, the capacity to cultivate self compassion is a possibility.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

Limitations of the study include the small sample size. A total sample of 116 young adults was chosen from different universities in Karachi city. A more diverse and large sample size might have yielded more elaborate results.

The Short Self Compassion Scale was utilized for the study. The short 12 item version was deemed ineffective, by the author, for comparing and analyzing the domains. For future research, the long 26 item version might serve as a more effective means of measuring self compassion and analyzing the relationship between the domains. As suggested by the scale author, using the long version might have yielded better results.

Coleman and Ganong (2004) mentioned that Muslim parenting has been an understudied area. Topics such as parenting styles and self compassion have an underrepresentation of the Muslim population. By utilizing different theoretical frameworks and scales, Muslim parenting styles can be explored in detail in future researches.

### **Conclusion**

The study illustrates that no significant relationship exists between parenting styles and self compassion. Findings suggest that several other factors might link to the levels of self compassion in an individual.

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