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Parenting Styles Perceived by Teenagers and School Achievement

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Abstract

Parenting styles (PS) are parents' attitudes towards their children's overall development and education. By establishing the family's environment and parents' behaviours, PS have been the focus of developmental psychology and family studies, namely in relation to child outcomes. This cross-sectional study analyses the impact of perceived PS by adolescents regarding their school achievement. 110 boys and 118 girls in years 5-9 of schooling ($M= 12.60$, $SD= 1.82$) from a state school in Lisbon answered a demographic form and the Parental Authority Questionnaire for both parents. Their grades and the number of retentions were analysed. Results show that authoritative parenting correlates to higher grades and better school achievement. Permissive and authoritarian styles correlate to worse school results (grades and number of years held back). Although PS may vary according to cultural contexts, these results are in line with previous international research findings that show that parents' authoritative parenting is associated with better children outcomes and school achievement. Age and school level have a significant effect on PS. Older and more educated parents are perceived as less permissive and authoritarian. No level of agreement between the PS of mother/father-teenager was found, suggesting that the parents perceive themselves differently than their children. The results contribute to parenting styles' knowledge within the Portuguese cultural context. They are also useful for organizing future, evidence-based interventions regarding parenting programmes and school underachievement and dropout preventing programmes.

Keywords: Authority Parenting Styles; School Achievement; Parents-teenagers dyads

Introduction

Authority Parenting Styles (PS), a tripartite construct initially developed by Baumrind (1971) based on the control and responsiveness dimensions that result in different standards of educating and rearing a child, has been pointed out as a relevant variable for child and family health. Darling and Steinberg (1993) define it as childrearing standards adopted by parents in the relationship with their children that create the emotional climate in which parents educate their children. Baumrind's tripartite model establishes that permissive parents are very responsive to their children's needs but do not monitor their children's behaviour; authoritarian parents have opposite educational standards (high control/demandingness and low responsiveness) seen often as harsh and strict. Authoritative parents encourage children autonomy/independence, allow them to explore but set up rules and limit their activity, using control whenever it is needed, and are affectionate and responsive to their children's development, characteristics, needs, and interests. Later, as a result of the combination of dimensions, PS led to other forms of PS (neglected, indulgent; inconsistent) (Maccoby, & Martin, 1983). The effects of different PS on children (positive and negative outcomes) are not constant across cultures and ethnic groups. Considering this, in 1993 Darling and Steinberg presented a contextual model of parenting that includes both individual and contextual aspects (Spera, 2005). Education and child rearing should always be studied in context, namely across groups and culture specifications and values and not from an ethnocentric viewpoint.

Several studies conducted in western cultures have identified authoritative PS as the one related to more positive outcomes for children, namely, high self-esteem, better school achievement and social adaptation and less disruptive symptoms. (Baumrind, 1972; 1991; 2005; Buri, 1991, Dornbusch, et al., 1987). However, these relations were not found in countries considered to have collectivist values and traditions, as opposed to an individual-oriented culture. Studies involving Latin-American, Afro-American, Asian-American and other oriental samples (China and Japan) have revealed that authoritarian PS is associated with more positive outcomes, namely higher school achievement (Huang & Gove, 2015; Nguyen, 2008; Weber, Prado, Viezzer, & Brandenburg, 2004). Heath (2012), Huang and Gove (2015) argue that there is an ethnic minority parenting