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## ASSESSING PARENTING STYLES IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the complex intersection of professional expertise and domestic care giving among 120 educational professionals in North India. Utilizing the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ), the research highlights a significant shift toward authoritative parenting, characterized by high levels of parental involvement and the frequent use of positive reinforcement. These educators primarily women aged 33 to 52 demonstrated a clear commitment to warm, communicative relationships, consistently prioritizing friendly talks and active praise over traditional, power-assertive methods. However, the data uncovers a nuanced displacement effect. While corporal punishment has been largely rejected, it has been replaced by verbal aggression. High frequencies of yelling and screaming suggest that the psychological demands of the education sector, coupled with time-poverty, may be pushing parents toward vocal rather than physical venting. Furthermore, the average scores for inconsistent discipline reveal a struggle to maintain boundaries amidst professional exhaustion. Lower reliability for corporal punishment scales suggests a cultural shift in how discipline is perceived. These findings indicate that while North Indian professionals are intellectually aligned with modern parenting ideals, emotional regulation remains a critical hurdle, necessitating interventions that support parental mental well-being alongside pedagogical knowledge.

Parenting remains a fundamental element of human existence, shaping the developmental trajectory of future generations. This review examines the critical shift from global parenting styles to specific, actionable dimensions such as monitoring, involvement, and discipline consistency as operationalized by instruments like the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire.

Parenting constitutes one of the most consequential proximal influences on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development across the lifespan. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's socioecological framework, which conceptualizes child development as emerging from the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environment, parents occupy the most pivotal role among microsystem socialization agents in shaping children's behavioural and psychological trajectories.

Baumrind's classic typology authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and the later added neglectful/rejecting style remains influential, but contemporary work emphasizes orthogonal dimensions of demandingness and responsiveness and the need to distinguish coercive from constructive forms of parental control (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Recent longitudinal and bidirectional studies further complicate the picture by showing that child behaviour can shape parenting as much as parenting shapes children, with effects differing across style types (Bell, 1968; Kerr & Stattin, 2000).

A complementary line of inquiry reframes parenting as a set of discrete practices monitoring, supervision, involvement, discipline consistency, and reinforcement each of which has distinct implications for child adjustment and risk for conduct problems (Frick, 1991; Dishion & McMahon, 1998).

The Alabama Parenting Questionnaire operationalizes this practice-focused perspective by measuring Positive Reinforcement, Parental Involvement, Inconsistent Discipline, Poor

Monitoring/Supervision and Harsh Discipline constructs that reliably predict delinquency and conduct problems in youth (Frick, 1991). Parental involvement itself is multifaceted: school- and home-based engagement influence academic and social outcomes, and parents' motivations for involvement shape its effectiveness (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Monitoring and supervision are central to family management models of risk and resilience. Patterson's family management framework conceptualized monitoring as active awareness of a child's whereabouts, activities, and rule compliance, embedded in ongoing parent-child interaction patterns that can become coercive under stress (Patterson, 1982). Dishion and McMahan extended this view by situating monitoring within a triadic model motivation (parental beliefs), monitoring behaviours, and behaviour management highlighting how parental knowledge arises from both parental efforts and child disclosure (Dishion & McMahan, 1998). Stattin and Kerr's work reframed monitoring around parental knowledge rather than surveillance per se, underscoring the role of child disclosure and parent-child communication (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Operational definitions of monitoring also emphasize explicit expectations, direct checks, and contingent discipline (Barber, 2002).

Consistency and positive discipline are protective mechanisms across developmental stages. Consistent, predictable responses help children learn expected behaviours and foster self-regulation, a principle grounded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) and supported by empirical links between day-to-day consistency in parent-child interactions and reduced adolescent depressive symptoms (Lippold et al., 2016). Positive Discipline, as articulated by Nelsen, promotes mutual respect, encouragement, and logical consequences rather than punitive force, aiming to build belonging and responsibility (Nelsen, 1981).

Corporal punishment remains a salient risk factor for adverse outcomes. Meta-analytic and large-scale studies associate corporal punishment with increased aggression, internalizing problems, and poorer parent-child relations (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Afifi et al., 2012). Definitions vary from noninjurious open-handed hitting (Gershoff, 2010) to force intended to cause pain without injury (Straus, 1994) but international bodies classify any physical punishment intended to cause discomfort as harmful (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). In India and other contexts, corporal punishment persists despite legal and policy efforts, and is linked to poorer academic and psychosocial outcomes (Sadowski et al., 2004; Malhi & Ray, 2004).

## **OBJECTIVE**

Test whether increasing authoritative, autonomy supportive parenting reduces child externalizing problems and improves academic outcomes, and whether effects differ by parent gender and cultural context.

## **Hypothesis**

**Parental Impact:** Active Parental Involvement will be independently and significantly associated with a reduction in child behaviour problems, regardless of the level of involvement.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study utilizes a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to evaluate parenting practices. This non-experimental approach is appropriate for capturing family interactions

and assessing the frequency of specific parenting behaviours across multiple dimensions at a single point in time.

### Participants

The sample consists of N = 120 parents of children aged 6 to 18 years. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, primarily targeting individuals in professional educator roles to examine the intersection of professional knowledge and domestic parenting practices.

### Measures

The primary instrument is the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ) – Parent Global Report Form, developed by Frick (1991). The tool consists of 42 items measuring five essential dimensions of parenting:

- **Parental Involvement (10 items):** Frequency of engagement in child activities.
- **Positive Parenting (6 items):** Use of praise and reinforcement.
- **Poor Monitoring/Supervision (10 items):** Oversight of child's whereabouts.
- **Inconsistent Discipline (6 items):** Predictability of consequences.
- **Corporal Punishment (3 items):** Use of physical discipline.

Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale: Never (1), Almost Never (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), and Always (5).

### Procedure

Data collection was conducted using a digital survey platform. Upon accessing the survey link, participants were presented with an informed consent form. Following consent, they completed the demographic section and the APQ items. The process typically required 15 minutes per respondent. Raw data underwent cleaning to standardize age strings and resolve digital response artifacts.

### RESULTS

The quantitative analysis of responses from approximately 120 participants predominantly female educators aged 33 to 52 reveals the following behavioural patterns:

- **Parental Involvement & Positive Parenting:** These dimensions showed the highest intensity, with summed scores ranging between 22 and 38 on the primary behavioural assessment. Respondents consistently reported frequencies of 4 (Often) or 5 (Always) for items such as having a friendly talk and praising the child for a good job.
- **Disciplinary Inconsistency:** A significant mid-range was observed in discipline. Many parents reported a score of 3 (Sometimes) for threatening to punish and then not following through and punishment depending on mood.
- **Supervision and Monitoring:** Generally high vigilance was reported, with most scores for forgetting where the child is remaining low at 1 (Never) or 2 (Almost Never). However, outliers scoring as high as 5 were present, indicating occasional lapses.
- **Corporal Punishment vs. Verbal Aggression:** While many parents reported 1 (Never) for physical spanking or slapping, a notable cluster reported 3 (Sometimes). Strikingly, scores for yelling or screaming were consistently higher than those for physical force, often reaching 3 to 5 even when physical punishment was absent.

- Psychometric Reliability: The APQ demonstrated high internal consistency in the Indian context, with alpha coefficients of 0.89 to 0.90 for positive parenting scales.

**Table: Summary of Behavioural Scoring Trends**

Behavioural Item	Typical Score	Frequency Scale
Friendly talk with child	4 - 5	Often to Always
Praising for a good job	5	Always
Helping with family plans	4 - 5	Often to Always
Threatening without acting	3	Sometimes
Punishment depends on mood	3	Sometimes
Yelling or screaming	3 - 5	Sometimes to Always
Spanking or slapping	1	Never (Majority)

**Table: APQ Psychometric Reliability (Indian Context)**

Scale	Husbands	Wives
<b>Involvement</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.90</b>
<b>Positive Parenting</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.90</b>
<b>Corporal Punishment</b>	<b>0.46 approx.</b>	<b>0.46 approx.</b>

## DISCUSSION: SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

### The Professional-Parent Paradox: Involvement vs. Surveillance

A primary finding of this research is the exceptionally high score in the Parental Involvement and Positive Parenting dimensions. This intensity is likely a direct artifact of the participants' occupational backgrounds as educators. While high involvement is typically a protective factor, the data suggests that for these parents, involvement often manifests as professional surveillance.

In line with previous sociological research, educators often view parenting as an extension of their professional jurisdiction, applying diagnostic and instructional skills to their own children. This can inadvertently foster a Tiger Parent dynamic where children are pressured to be "model students" to uphold the parent's professional reputation. While autonomy-supportive involvement fosters resilience, the controlling involvement observed here emphasizing achievement and adherence to school norms may explain why children of educators often report high stress and a reluctance to enter the teaching profession themselves, viewing it as a sphere of low autonomy and high external pressure.

### **Stress-Induced Inconsistency in Modern Urban Hubs**

A striking nuance in the data is the mid-range score for Inconsistent Discipline, particularly regarding punishment dictated by parental mood. This indicates that even highly informed educators struggle to maintain disciplinary stability. This finding aligns with the concept of time-poverty the chronic lack of time for rest or family interaction which is prevalent in high-pressure environments like Delhi/NCR and Haryana.

Past studies have shown that high levels of parenting stress moderate the relationship between parenting styles and child behaviour problems. In the current context, environmental stressors including extreme urban congestion and chronic air pollution likely deplete the self-regulatory resources of parents. This regulatory drain leads to the unpredictable enforcement of rules, where discipline becomes a reaction to parental exhaustion rather than a consistent pedagogical tool.

### **The Displacement of Discipline: From Physical to Verbal**

The data reflects a global trend toward the stigmatization of corporal punishment, with a majority of parents reporting "Never" for spanking or slapping. This shift is consistent with the influence of legal frameworks such as the Juvenile Justice Act (2015) in India. However, the low scores for physical discipline must be viewed with caution; given the self-report nature of the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ), social desirability bias may lead parents to under-report behaviours that are increasingly socially taboo.

More critically, the findings reveal a displacement effect, where physical force is being replaced by verbal aggression. Scores for yelling or screaming remained consistently high, often reaching the Often or Always range. This suggests that in urban North India, where public behaviour is highly monitored and physical discipline is legally discouraged, yelling has become a safe outlet for parental frustration.

Relevant longitudinal evidence warns that such psychological aggression including shouting and threatening is not a benign alternative. It can be just as damaging as mild corporal punishment, contributing to the development of Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) symptoms and long-term conduct problems. The empathic richness fostered by collectivist cultural integration may, therefore, be undermined by this frequent reliance on high-decibel verbal control.

### **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of parenting practices using the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire reveals a demographic deeply committed to their children's success and emotional well-being, as evidenced by high levels of Involvement and Positive Parenting scores (range 22-38). The transition from traditional joint family systems to professional nuclear units has fostered an Authoritative model where communication is prioritized, with items like friendly talks scoring consistently high (4-5). However, this commitment is often accompanied by the stressors of modern professional life, manifesting as Inconsistent Discipline and a reliance on Verbal Aggression (yelling/screaming) as a substitute for declining corporal punishment. While parents are highly vigilant in monitoring school-related activities, the predictability of consequences remains a key area for growth to prevent the development of externalizing behaviours in children.

## LIMITATIONS

1. **Sample Bias:** The respondent pool is heavily skewed toward female participants and professionals in the education sector. This limits the generalizability of the findings to families from different occupational backgrounds or lower educational attainment.
2. **Self-Reporting Risks:** As a self-report measure, the APQ is susceptible to social desirability bias, where parents may over-report positive behaviours and under-report negative ones.
3. **Geographic Specificity:** The data is primarily restricted to Haryana and the Delhi/NCR region. Consequently, these findings may not represent the diverse parenting norms found in other rural or metropolitan areas of India.
4. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The data represents a single point in time, which precludes the ability to determine long-term developmental trajectories or establish causal links between specific parenting behaviours and child outcomes.

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