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MATERNAL AND PATERNAL PARENTING STYLES AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG INDIAN YOUNG ADULTS: UNIQUE ASSOCIATIONS AND THE SALIENCE OF PATERNAL AUTHORITARIANISM

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ABSTRACT

Parenting styles play an important role in shaping young adults' self-esteem; however, research examining the distinct contributions of mothers and fathers in the Indian context remains limited. The present study aims at exploring the association between maternal and paternal parenting styles and self-esteem in Indian young adults with special attention to the contribution of both the mother and the father. The cross-sectional correlational design was used with 361 participants (18-43 years). The data were gathered using Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) then analysed with correlation and multiple regression techniques. The results showed that both mothers' (r = .33) and fathers' (r = .32) authoritative parenting styles had positive relationships with self-esteem, while mothers' (r = −.25) and fathers' (r =−.32) authoritarian parenting styles had negative relationships with self-esteem. The parenting styles showed small positive correlations but when the other parenting styles were taken into account, these were not significant. In the combined regression model, only paternal authoritarianism (β=−.22) and maternal authoritativeness (β = .17) had unique associations with self-esteem. Both parents were involved in explaining differences in self-esteem; however, in different ways. There was no significant difference between females and males in terms of self-esteem. The study underscores the significance of analysing maternal and paternal parenting separately and proposes that supportive guidance, responsiveness and decreased authoritarian control may apply in the explanations of self-esteem with Indian young adults.

Keywords: *Parenting Styles, Self-Esteem, Fathers, Emerging Adulthood, India, Parental Authority Questionnaire.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is one's overall assessment of self-worth and is a key factor in psychological growth. It is fairly consistent throughout life and has some impact on relationships, work and mental health (Orth & Robins, 2014). It is partly acquired through significant others' interactions (Harter, 2012) and

sociometer theory suggests that self-esteem is related to social acceptance and rejection (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Self-esteem and social relationships also appear to work both ways, as evidenced by the findings from longitudinal research (Harris & Orth, 2020), and the findings from the family environment and family warmth on the development of self-esteem (Krauss et al., 2020). This is an influence that persists in the young adult.

The psychological well-being is also related to self-esteem. A recent metacognitive study revealed that self-esteem was inversely related to depressive symptoms and it was found to mediate the parenting dimensions and depression (Tehrani et al., 2025). So, it is important to know how parenting styles are associated to self-esteem.

1.1.Parenting Styles: Theory and Measurement

Parenting styles are the common approaches to raising children and the kinds of relationships parents have with them. In parenting, three main approaches are typically acknowledged: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. The authoritarian style of parenting is cold and demanding, with an emphasis on compliance, whereas the permissive style is more lenient and welcoming. Warmth and responsiveness are hallmarks of authoritative parenting, as are clear expectations and boundaries (Williams & Ciarrochi, 2020).

Young adults may view their relationship with their mother and father differently; therefore, it is critical to consider both separately. Such parental influences are applicable to psychological outcomes like self-esteem, personal values and emotional development. Another factor to consider is parents' control. Supportive guidance is when there is clear guidance and behaviour boundaries, while too much control can limit independence and decision making. There are differences between the two approaches that help to explain the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem.

1.2.Evidence Linking Parenting to Self-Esteem

Numerous significant studies have repeatedly shown a correlation between parenting approaches and self-esteem. Based on the findings of this 116-study meta-analysis, authoritative parenting was positively correlated with self-esteem ($r = .26$), whereas authoritarian and neglectful parenting were negatively correlated ($r = -.18$). Researchers discovered a weak positive correlation ($r = .07$) between self-esteem and lenient parenting styles; furthermore, the findings suggested a possible bidirectional interaction between the two variables.

Another recent meta-analysis of 53 studies and 74 independent samples revealed positive relationships between parental support ($\beta = .29$) and authoritative control ($\beta = .23$) and self-esteem, and a negative

relationship between psychological control (β = −.26) and self-esteem (Tehrani et al., 2025). The results show the need to balance supporting guidance with intrusive parental control. But most of the available research is limited to children and adolescents and not as much research has investigated young adults. Peer relationships, school experiences, and identity development are also factors in self-esteem, in addition to parenting.

1.3.Theoretical Mechanisms

Parental acceptance–rejection theory suggests that parental warmth plays an important role in psychological adjustment across different age groups (Khaleque & Rohner, 2012). Similarly, self-determination theory emphasises the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness for psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). From this perspective, intrusive control may undermine autonomy, whereas supportive guidance and clear expectations can promote development (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). These mechanisms also apply to emerging adults. Research links parental psychological control and autonomy support with self-esteem (Gong & Wang, 2023), while psychological control is also associated with psychological problems (Williams & McKinney, 2024). Therefore, authoritarian parenting is expected to be negatively associated with self-esteem, whereas authoritative parenting is expected to show a positive association. The relationship with permissive parenting remains less clear because it combines warmth with limited guidance.

1.4.The Permissive Puzzle

The results in the literature have been most varied with respect to permissive parenting. Studies of the indulgent style (high warmth, low strictness) have revealed that this parenting style is linked to self-esteem that is equal to or higher than that associated with authoritative parenting in several European and Latin American countries (Garcia et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2020). The positive correlations of PAQ scores with authoritative scores and with self-esteem should be due primarily to warmth and latitude, and therefore should be greater when the other styles are not considered. If they primarily refer to neglect or lack of guidance, they should have little or a negative connection with self-esteem. The following possibilities have to be distinguished when considering permissive parenting in conjunction with the other parenting styles.

1.5.Culture and the Indian Family Context

Parenting practices could also be defined differently in different cultures, especially in cultures that value interdependence among family members and reverence elders, where a rigid approach by parents may be perceived as caring and protective, not rejecting. Yet there is cross-cultural evidence that

parenting–outcome relationships are generally similar, but that the strength of the relationship is affected by culture (Lansford, 2022). Modest regional variations were also found in these associations (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018). Studies conducted in India suggest that authoritative parenting tends to have a positive system of consequences, while authoritarian parenting has negative consequences, and permissive parenting has mixed consequences (Sharma, & Pandey, 2015). Urbanisation, nuclearisation and greater employment of women also drive changes in Indian family structures which lead to higher levels of involvement of fathers in childrearing, especially in cities (Rathi et al., 2024; Sriram, 2011). However, fathers' involvement in parenting studies in India has been relatively unstudied (Rathi et al., 2024).

1.6.Mothers, Fathers, and Emerging Adulthood

The parenting literature frequently lumped together the influence of mother and father without accounting for the fact that parenting is likely to be different on both sides. In a study of 2806 Chinese school students, the researchers discovered that self-esteem was directly and indirectly related to the parenting of mothers while it was indirectly related to the parenting of fathers via body image (Huang & Wan, 2025). This emphasises the need to consider both parents individually.

This is especially important in the context of emerging adulthood, a time of development of identity and increasing independence (Arnett, 2000). Even though young adults are more independent, parental expectations remain an influence on them, especially in India where many are linked or dependent on their family (Menon et al., 2025). Maternal authoritative parenting has been associated with increased self-esteem and decreased psychological issues in emerging adult females (Szkody et al., 2021). Likewise, paternal authoritarianism has been linked to fathers' self-esteem via overprotective parenting (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2009). Hence, the importance of studying paternal authoritarianism in conjunction with maternal parenting in the context of self-esteem of the Indian young adults.

1.7.Gender and Self-Esteem

A meta-analysis revealed a small average male advantage in self-esteem that was greatest in late adolescence, and cross-national self-esteem data from 48 countries suggests that there is a male self-esteem advantage as well, with the size of this advantage found to significantly differ across cultures and developmental periods (Bleidorn et al., 2016). There is little systematic study on whether there is such a disparity between young adults in India.

1.8.Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- To examine the relationship between maternal and paternal authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles and self-esteem among Indian young adults.
- To identify the unique contributions of maternal and paternal parenting styles in explaining young adults' self-esteem and compare their relative contributions.
- To examine gender differences in self-esteem and explore whether the relationships between parenting styles and self-esteem vary between men and women.

1.9.Hypothesis of the Study

The present study examines maternal and paternal parenting styles and their relationship with self-esteem among Indian young adults. The following are the hypothesis of the study:

H1a. Authoritative parenting will be positively correlated with self-esteem.

H1b. Authoritarian parenting will be negatively correlated with self-esteem.

H1c (exploratory). Because previous findings are mixed, no direction was specified for the association between permissive parenting and self-esteem.

H2. Men will report higher self-esteem than women, consistent with meta-analytic evidence of a small male advantage.

2. METHOD

2.1.Design and Data Collection

The research design was cross-sectional correlational survey. The data were collected online by Google Forms in the COVID-19 pandemic with two waves of data collection, resulting in two response files. The sample size was obtained by purposive sampling and snowball sampling and the form was limited to people aged 18 years old and above.

2.2.Data Screening

There were 442 responses (302 in Wave 1 and 140 in Wave 2) across the two data collection files. Data screening was conducted in three stages. First, 26 corrupted records were excluded because of missing parenting items and incorrect self-esteem totals. Second, 19 additional cases were removed, including 12 duplicate response sets, one underage respondent, and six cases of invariant responding (defined as providing at least 54 identical answers to the 60 parenting items). Third, 36 records were excluded from the primary analysis because their response provenance could not be verified. These

records showed unusual response patterns, including consistently high parental ratings, no use of the highest response category, and unusually high mean self-esteem scores. Although these patterns raised concerns about the reliability of the records, they did not establish that the responses were duplicates. Following these exclusions, the final analytic sample consisted of 361 participants. For sensitivity analysis, the 36 records with unverified provenance were included alongside the primary sample, resulting in an expanded sample of 397 participants.

Table 1: Flow of Records Through Data Screening

Step	Records removed	Records remaining
Response records in both files	—	442
Corrupted records (unscorable)	26	416
Duplicate response sets	12	404
Respondent younger than 18 years	1	403
Invariant responding (≥ 54 of 60 identical parenting answers)	6	397
Records of unverified provenance	36	361
Final analytic sample		361

Note. The 36 records of unverified provenance were retained in a sensitivity analysis (*N* = 397; Table 5).

2.3.Participants

The final sample comprised 361 participants: 194 women (53.7%), 163 men (45.2%), and four non-binary participants (1.1%). Ages ranged from 18 to 43 years (M = 22.11, SD = 3.67, Mdn = 21; one participant did not report age), and 85.8% were aged 18–25. Half of them were undergraduate students (50.7%) while the others were postgraduate students (24.4%), doctoral students (8.9%) or had finished Grade 12 (15.8%). Most were unmarried (83.7%) and lived in nuclear (62.0%) or joint families (30.7%). The majority lived in urban settings (64.5%) and the rest in rural (23.8%) or semi-urban (11.6%) areas. These characteristics are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	*n*	%
Gender	Women	194	53.7
	Men	163	45.2
	Non-binary	4	1.1

Age (years)	18–20	141	39.1
	21–25	168	46.5
	26–30	39	10.8
	31–43	12	3.3
	Not reported	1	0.3
Education	Completed Grade 12	57	15.8
	Undergraduate	183	50.7
	Postgraduate	88	24.4
	Doctoral	32	8.9
	Not reported	1	0.3
Number of siblings	0	56	15.5
	1	166	46
	2	81	22.4
	3 or more	58	16.1
Birth order	Only child	56	15.5
	First-born	127	35.2
	Middle	50	13.9
	Last-born	126	34.9
	Other (second-born, twin)	2	0.6
Family structure	Nuclear	224	62
	Joint	111	30.7
	Extended	18	5
	Living alone	8	2.2
Marital status	Unmarried	302	83.7
	Married	57	15.8
	Divorced	2	0.6
Residence	Urban	233	64.5
	Semi-urban	42	11.6
	Rural	86	23.8

Participant Characteristics (N = 361)

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

2.4.Measures

Parental Authority Questionnaire

The parenting was measured using the PAQ that was filled out independently by the mother and the father. Each version contains 30 items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with 10 items for each style: permissive (items 1, 6, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24, 28), authoritarian (2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 16, 18, 25, 26, 29), and authoritative (4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 20, 22, 23, 27, 30). Items are added up within each subscale (range 10–50) and there is no reverse scoring. Each parent had three style scores, which were analysed as three separate continuous variables. The present sample had good internal consistency for all six subscales (α = .85 to .89; Table 3).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used to measure global self-esteem, which was measured by a 4-point scale ranging between 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Items 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 were reverse-scored and the items were summed (range 10–40) with higher scores reflecting higher self-esteem. The RSES has also demonstrated a similar structure and reliability in 53 countries, including India (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). The α value for the present sample is .83.

2.5.Procedure

An information page describing the aims of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and the confidentiality of responses was presented at the beginning of the survey, and informed consent was obtained before participating in the survey. The form asked for demographic data and then the RSES were followed by the maternal and paternal PAQs. Before analysis, names were anonymised with study ID codes.

2.6.Data Preparation

All scores were derived from item level answers. Total scores were not calculated and used as stored in the original response files, as the total score calculation was not consistent (several records did not reverse score the negatively worded RSES items). The maternal and paternal PAQ items were alternated (mother 1, father 1, and so on) in the response files and the two sets were separated prior to scoring. The responses in the PAQ had been recorded as text labels (e.g., “Agree”) for 20 participants so the responses for these were converted to numeric values. One paternal item response of “Dis4” was coded as disagree (2). The analytic sample had no missing item responses.

2.7.Statistical Analysis

Python 3.13, pandas 3.0, SciPy 1.18, and stats models 0.15 were used for the analysis. The link between

parenting methods and self-esteem was examined using Pearson correlations; the Fisher z transformation was used to calculate 95% confidence intervals (CI); p-values were adjusted for multiple comparisons (six correlations). Spearman correlations were subjected to a sensitivity analysis after the Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed that certain data did not meet normality assumptions. The gender differences were examined using the Mann-Whitney U test, Cohen's d, and an independent-samples t-test. The four non-binary participants were only excluded from gender comparisons.

Multiple regression was used for the analysis of RQ1, where the unique contribution of each parenting style by both parents to self-esteem was analysed using standardised coefficient (B) and squared semi-partial correlation (sr2). In RQ2, Steiger used a z test to compare the maternal and paternal correlations, and hierarchical regression to compare how much each unique contribution to the correlation. Multicollinearity among the VIFs was tested. Records that were not verified, separate collection waves, ages 18 to 25, as well as age and gender adjustments were added to the robustness analyses. The difference in the parenting–self-esteem correlations between the sexes was also explored using exploratory Fisher z tests. With $N = 361$ and $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed), the study had 80% power to detect correlations of $|r| \geq .15$ and, for the gender comparison (163 men, 194 women), standardised mean differences of $d \geq 0.30$.

3. RESULTS

3.1.Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Descriptive statistics, internal consistency and intercorrelations are given in table 3. Mean self-esteem was 28.50 (SD = 5.79; observed range 12–40). Authoritative parenting was the most rated parenting style by both mothers (M = 34.48) and fathers (M = 33.78), followed by authoritarian parenting (mothers M = 27.34, fathers M = 27.75), and permissive parenting (mothers M = 26.49, fathers M = 26.47). All scales had good internal consistency (α = .83–.89). The style scores in the parents were only slightly correlated within each parent. Permissive and authoritarian scores were not significantly related (mothers r = .01, fathers r = −.06); permissive and authoritative scores were positively correlated (mothers r = .21, fathers r = .30); and authoritarian and authoritarian scores were negatively correlated (mothers r = −.34, fathers r = −.30). Correlations between ratings of mothers and fathers of the same style were moderate to strong (permissive r = .48, authoritarian r = .47, authoritative r = .66).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, Internal Consistency, and Intercorrelations of Study Variables (N = 361)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Rang	α	1	2	3	4	5	6

			e							
1. Self-esteem (RSES)	28.50	5.79	12–40	.83	—					
2. Mother permissive	26.49	7.35	10–43	.86	.13*	—				
3. Mother authoritarian	27.34	7.55	10–48	.86	−.25**	.01	—			
4. Mother authoritative	34.48	7.83	10–50	.89	.33**	.21**	−.34**	—		
5. Father permissive	26.47	7.32	10–45	.85	.17**	.48**	−.03	.22**	—	
6. Father authoritarian	27.75	7.48	10–46	.86	−.32**	−.02	.47**	−.20**	−.06	—
7. Father authoritative	33.78	8.12	10–50	.89	.32**	.18**	−.17**	.66**	.30**	−.30**

Note. Range = observed minimum–maximum; possible ranges are 10–40 for the RSES and 10–50 for each PAQ subscale. RSES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; PAQ = Parental Authority Questionnaire. *p* values are unadjusted. * = $p < .05$. ** = $p < .01$.

3.2.Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem (H1a–H1c)

The bivariate associations with self-esteem are presented in Tables 4 and 1, and in scatterplots in Fig. 2. Consistent with H1a, authoritative parenting was positively associated with self-esteem for mothers, r(359) = .329, 95% CI [.234, .418], p <.001, and fathers, r(359) = .321, 95% CI [.225, .410], p < .001. Consistent with H1b, authoritarian parenting was negatively associated with self-esteem for fathers, r(359) = −.321, 95% CI [−.410, −.225], p < .001, and mothers, r(359) = −.250, 95% CI [−.344, −.150], p < .001. Regarding H1c, permissive parenting showed small positive associations with self-esteem for fathers, r(359) = .172, 95% CI [.070, .270], p = .001, and mothers, r(359) = .125, 95% CI [.022, .226], p = .017. All six associations were significant post Holm adjustment ($p \leq .017$). The level of variance in self-esteem accounted for by individual styles ranged from 1.6% to 10.8%.

The directions and significance structure ($\rho = -.31$ to .30, all $p < .05$) remained unchanged with Spearman correlations.

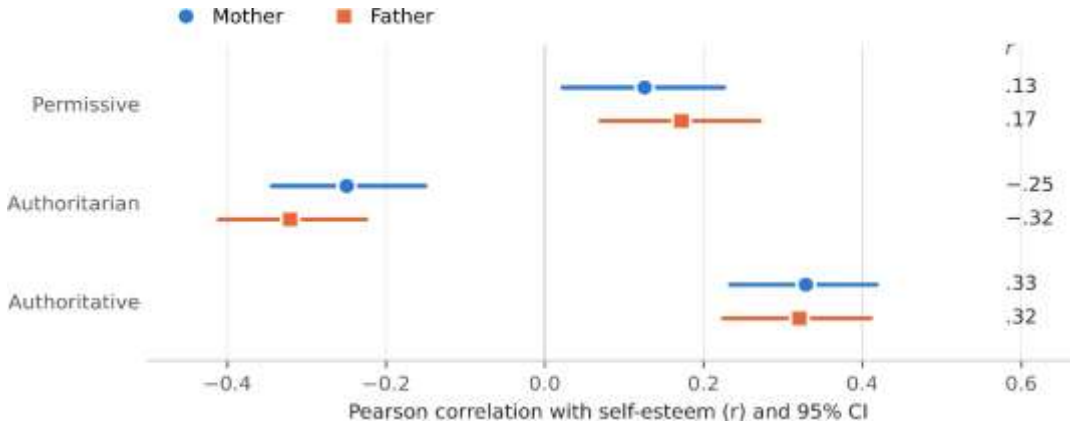


Figure 1: Pearson correlations between parenting styles and self-esteem with 95% confidence intervals ($N = 361$). Circles denote mothers and squares denote fathers; all six associations remained significant after Holm adjustment for six tests. The vertical line marks $r = 0$

3.3.Unique Associations of Each Style (RQ1)

For the purpose of exploring unique associations, self-esteem was regressed on the three style scores of each parent (Table 4). There was no significant multicollinearity (VIFs = 1.05 - 1.20). The maternal model explained 13.5% of the variance in self-esteem, F(3, 357) = 18.50, p < .001. The maternal authoritative parenting style (β = .26, p < .001, sr2 = .056) and the maternal authoritative parenting style (β= −.16, p = .002, sr2 = .023) were uniquely related to self-esteem, while the maternal permissive parenting style was not (β = .07, p = .151). The paternal model explained 16.6% of the variance, F(3, 357) = 23.62, p < .001. Paternal authoritarian parenting had the largest unique association with self-esteem (β = −.25, p < .001, sr2 = .056) followed by paternal authoritative parenting (β = .22, p < .001, sr2 = .039) and paternal permissive parenting was not uniquely associated with self-esteem (β = .09, p = .072). Therefore, the small bivariate relationships with permissive parenting were not maintained after the simultaneous removal of the other parenting styles of the same parent.

Table 4: Bivariate Correlations and Within-Parent Regression Models Predicting Self-Esteem from Parenting Styles (N = 361)

Parenting style	***r***	**95% CI**	***p* (Holm)**	**β**	***p* (β)**	***sr*²**
Mother						
Permissive	.125	[.022, .226]	.017	.07	.151	.005
Authoritarian	−.250	[−.344, −.150]	< .001	−.16	.002	.023
Authoritative	.329	[.234, .418]	< .001	.26	< .001	.056

Maternal model: R^2 = .135, adjusted R^2 = .127, $F(3, 357) = 18.50$, $p < .001$						
Father						
Permissive	.172	[.070, .270]	.002	.09	.072	.008
Authoritarian	−.321	[−.410, −.225]	< .001	−.25	< .001	.056
Authoritative	.321	[.225, .410]	< .001	.22	< .001	.039
Parenting style	*r*	95% CI	*p* (Holm)	β	*p* (β)	sr^2
Paternal model: R^2 = .166, adjusted R^2 = .159, $F(3, 357) = 23.62$, $p < .001$						

Note. *r* = zero-order Pearson correlation with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale total; CI = confidence interval (Fisher *z*); *p* (Holm) = *p* adjusted for six tests. β = standardised regression coefficient from the model including all three styles of the same parent; sr^2 = squared semi partial correlation (variance uniquely associated with the style). Regression analyses were exploratory.

3.4.Mothers Versus Fathers (RQ2)

There were no significant differences between maternal and paternal correlations: authoritarian, Steiger's z = 1.39, p = .165; authoritative, Steiger's z = 0.20, p = .841; permissive, Steiger's z = −0.88, p = .378. Both the paternal scores explained more variance than the maternal scores, ΔR2 = .059, F (3, 354) = 8.60, p < .001, and the maternal scores explained more variance than the paternal scores, although only about half as much, ΔR2 = .028, F (3, 354) = 4.06, p = .007, in hierarchical models.

Together, the six scores explained 19.3% of the variance in self-esteem, F (6, 354) = 14.14, p < .001. In this combined model (VIFs ≤ 2.04) only paternal authoritarian parenting (β = −.22, p < .001) and maternal authoritative parenting (β = .17, p = .011) had unique associations with self-esteem, while all other coefficients were not significant (p ≥ .13).

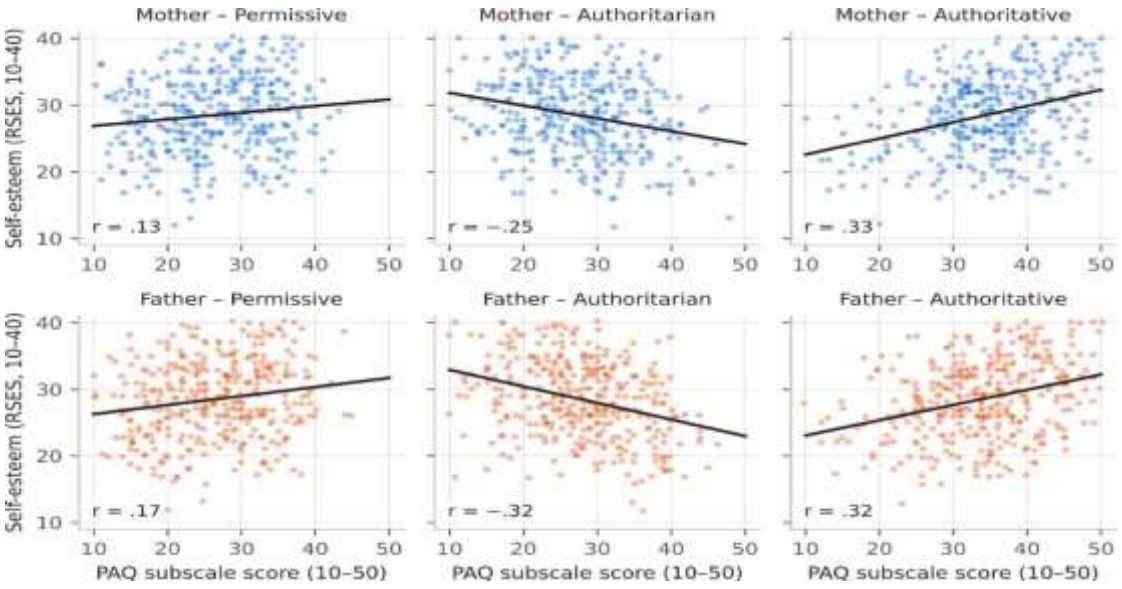


Figure 2: Scatterplots of maternal (top row) and paternal (bottom row) parenting style scores against self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale total) with least-squares regression lines ($N = 361$). Points are slightly jittered to show overlapping observations

3.5.Robustness of the Findings

Similar null results were found for the association between age and self-esteem, r = .04, p = .495, as well as when each of the within-parent models was adjusted for age and gender (e.g., paternal authoritarian β = −.25, maternal authoritative β = .26). The authoritarian and authoritative associations were both in the same direction and significant at both collections, and at each collection, and in the 18–25 subsample, and when checking of records of unverified provenance. The associations that were permissive were the least stable, being larger if the unverified records were counted (mothers r = .209, fathers r = .250), and not significant in the second wave in the case of the mothers.

Table 5: Correlations Between Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem Across Sensitivity Analyses and by Gender

Parenting style	Primary	Incl. unverified	Wave 1	Wave 2	Age 18–25	Men	Women
n	361	397	221	140	309	163	194
Mother permissive	.13*	.21**	.15*	.07	.13*	.05	.20**
Mother	−.25	−.24**	−.26*	−.23*	−.25**	−.21*	−.27*

authoritarian	**		*	*		*	*
Mother authoritative	.33**	.30**	.37**	.26**	.30**	.25**	.36**
Father permissive	.17**	.25**	.16*	.18*	.17**	.24**	.10
Father authoritarian	−.32**	−.31**	−.32**	−.33**	−.32**	−.32**	−.33**
Father authoritative	.32**	.30**	.39**	.21*	.31**	.29**	.33**

Note. Values are Pearson correlations with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale total. Primary = final analytic sample; Incl. unverified = primary sample plus the 36 records of unverified provenance; Wave 1 and Wave 2 = primary-sample participants from each collection wave. None of the six differences between men's and women's correlations was significant (Fisher *z* test $p = .15–.92$). $p < .05$. *p < .01 (unadjusted).

3.6.Gender Differences (H2)

Unlike H2, there was no evidence of men having higher self-esteem than women. Men's mean score (M = 28.63, SD = 5.61, n = 163) was almost identical to women's (M = 28.53, SD = 5.92, n = 194), t(355) = 0.15, p = .877, mean difference = 0.09, 95% CI [−1.11, 1.30], d = 0.02. Variances were equal (Levene's F = 1.11, p = .293), and the Mann–Whitney test agreed (p =.969).

There was no difference between the men and women in their perception of either parent on any style (all Welch p ≥ .10). All parenting–self-esteem correlations were positive and similar for women and men (Table 5); the Fisher z test showed that none of the six correlations were significant when separated by gender (p = .15–.92).

4. DISCUSSION

Results of this study supported the finding that authoritative parenting was correlated with high self-esteem, while authoritarian parenting was correlated with low self-esteem, which was also supported by previous studies (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019). Both parents contributed with the paternal authoritarianism and maternal authoritativeness as the highest unique correlates.

4.1.Authoritative and Authoritarian Parenting

The associations of authoritative (r = .33 and .32) and authoritarian (r = −.25 and −.32) parenting were medium in size, and for authoritarian parenting, larger than the meta-analytic estimates for children

and adolescents (r = .26 and −.18; Pinquart & Gerke, 2019). They were strong when corrected for multiple testing, ranked, adjusted for age and gender, and were not sensitive to any sensitivity analysis. This is consistent with both parental acceptance-rejection theory and self-determination theory: Warm parenting that is explained and responsive reinforces positive self-regard, while warm parenting experiences of demanding unquestioned obedience do not. (Khaleque & Rohner, 2012; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). It also agrees with meta-analytic evidence that authoritative control is a positive correlate of self-esteem and psychological control a negative one (Tehrani et al., 2025).

The results are inconsistent with a recent Indian study which found that authoritative parenting was negatively correlated with self-esteem (Ahmad & Ojha, 2025). The present findings indicate that, with careful screening of data quality and parenting separately assessed from each parent, young adults in India exhibit the same general trend as other countries reported internationally (Sahithya et al., 2019). Variations in results between Indian studies might be due to sampling, measurement and analysis rather than to cultural variation.

4.2.The Distinct Contributions of Mothers and Fathers

When both parents were modelled together, paternal authoritarianism and maternal authoritativeness were the only unique correlates of self-esteem. The division is the same as the traditional Indian family structure, where mother is the main source of nurturing and father is the main source of discipline and authority (Kakar, 1978). In that framework, it seems to be the mother's mental state, whether she thinks and reacts, whether she is a harsh father, that the child's self-esteem follows. It is also consistent with evidence that an authoritarian father relates to young adults' self-esteem indirectly through overprotection (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2009) and with research indicating that the pathway of maternal and paternal parenting to self-esteem are different (Huang & Wan, 2025).

Two cautions apply. First, the correlation data do not indicate that one parent is more important than the other for any given style—as none of the corresponding maternal and paternal correlations differed significantly. Second, some of the combined-model coefficients are due to the moderate-to-strong overlap of the ratings of the two parents. The more confident we can draw the conclusion that both parents contribute, with fathers' parenting styles contributing slightly more unique information, which supports the argument that fathers should also be included in the study of parenting in India (Rathi et al., 2024).

4.3.Permissive Parenting

Small bivariate positive relationships with self-esteem were found for permissive parenting, which

were not present when the other parenting styles of the same parent were included, and were the weakest relationship across subsamples. This is corroborated by the very low average association meta-analytically reported (r = .07; Pinquart & Gerke, 2019) and the inconsistent findings in Indian and western studies (Sahithya et al., 2019) on permissive parenting. The weak positive relationship between permissive and authoritative scores with SE is likely to be due to the warmth that they show to their parenting, rather than to permissiveness per se. The permissive scores for this sample of PAQ items more closely resembled measures of warmth and latitude than measures of neglect, with respect to the puzzle described in the introduction to this report.

4.4.Gender and Self-Esteem

The hypothesised male superiority in self-esteem was not confirmed. There were no significant differences between men and women (d = 0.02) and the 95% CI for the difference (−1.11 to 1.30 RSES points) does not suggest differences of more than approximately 0.2 standard deviations. This is a useful null result as the study was sufficiently powered to detect small to moderate difference. Meta-analytic and cross-national data revealed a small male advantage, but significant differences between cultures and developmental periods (Bleidorn et al., 2016; Kling et al., 1999); in this group of educated young adults in India, there was no such difference. Self-esteem was also related to parenting for both men and women.

4.5.Implications

The results of such replication would indicate that the family contextualised programmes in India should promote family discussions, reasoning and responsiveness from both parents, especially in reducing harsh paternal control. Maternal and paternal parenting needs to be analysed separately, and all three PAQs analysed together. The results should be used to inform future intervention studies, but not as guidelines for clinical practice because of the cross-sectional design and small effects.

4.6.Limitations and Future Directions

Because of the cross-sectional design, causal inferences are not possible (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019). The generalisability is restricted due to purposive and snowball sampling, as well as a predominantly educated and urban sample, and due to the use of self-reports (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Also, 26 faulty records and 36 unverifiable records were removed. The age range of the sample was 18–43 years, but the majority were in the age group 18–25 years. The PAQ does not directly measure warmth or psychological control or neglectful parenting, and the collection of data during COVID-19 may have affected parental perceptions.

Longitudinal and more diverse research with samples, especially non-student young adults in rural areas, is warranted to look at the relationship between parenting style and self-esteem over time. Measures should be developed to differentiate between parental warmth, behavioural control and psychological control, and should also include parent and young adult reports in the future. Studies that examined separately the role of maternal and paternal parenting, which are preregistered, would also bolster the current evidence.

5. CONCLUSION

The study findings indicate that self-esteem is significantly and meaningfully related to parenting style of both the mother and father on Indian young adults. Authoritative parenting correlates positively with high self-esteem, while authoritarian parenting correlates negatively with high self-esteem, stating the significance of supportive guidance in parenting, responsiveness and balanced parenting control. Permissive parenting shows small positive associations, but not when the other parenting styles are taken into account. The composite analysis suggests that paternal authoritarianism and maternal authoritativeness are the most unique correlates, suggesting that both parents positively affect youth self-esteem in different aspects of parenting. In addition, the lack of significant differences between gender indicates that these relationships are generally comparable for males and females in the current sample. The results overall highlight the importance of considering mothers' and fathers' parenting behaviours separately from their parenting influence as a whole. For future scope, longitudinal and/or more diverse studies might yield a more complete understanding of parental effects on self-esteem during emerging adulthood.

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