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## Gender differences in parenting: A perceptual view from adolescents and from parents

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### Abstract

The study entitled “Gender differences in parenting: a perceptual view from adolescence and parents” was undertaken at Barpeta district of Lower Assam of North East India. Sample of the study comprised of 200 adolescents between age 16 to 17 years of age and their parents. A self developed parenting style tool was used for studying parenting style. The tool comprising of 32 items in four parenting styles as subscale. To observe the gender differences on adolescents’ perception on parenting and parents’ perception on parenting, means, standard deviations were calculated and compared and independent t-test was computed for determining the differences between the groups. Results revealed that no significant gender difference was observed in both adolescents’ perception on their parents’ parenting styles and parents’ perception on their own parenting.

**Keywords:** Parenting, adolescents, parents, perception of adolescents, perception of parents

### Introduction

Parenting is both a biological and a social process (Lerner *et al.*, 1995; Tobach and Schneirla, 1968) [12, 19]. Parenting is dynamic, changing over time in accordance with their children’s ages and developmental needs (Galinsky, 1986 and Smilansky, 1989) [7, 17]. Children’s other characteristics like gender, physical appearance, temperament governs the parenting practices. Above all sociocultural factors such as culturally defined parenting goals, beliefs about child rearing practices, social support, social norms and rules, socioeconomic status, family characteristics, neighborhood and the present world view are embedded in parenting of an individual. Among all, one of the important characteristics of children which influence parenting is the child’s gender. Gender roles are beliefs about the ways in which individual, familial, community and societal roles are defined by gender (Slavkin and Straight, 2000) [16]. Consistent with parents’ differing goals for girls and boys, parenting styles have also been shown to differ across the gender of the child. Parenting behaviors and parenting goals are again defined by societal norms. Thus influenced once parenting. Research in western cultures has shown that parents report using authoritarian parenting with boys, while authoritative parenting with girls. An Asian review work done by Kausar and Shafique (2008) [9] wrote that in Pakistan’s socio-cultural context adolescent girls are brought up in a more protective environment and get more parental attention. Girls are expected to stay at home and spend most of their time with family. Boys are allowed to socialize and spend time outside home with their friends, for girls, it is not acceptable. Again another study of Saraswathi and Pai (1997) [13] found that in India, authoritarian parenting is considered with Hindu values of respect for and duty towards one’s parents. The study of Seymour’s (1999) [15] describes how joint households in India addressed children by their kinship, gender, and birth order rather than by their personal names, which might place undue emphasis on their individuality. Studies on fathers and mothers parenting behaviour separately, Larson and Richards (1994) [11] have argued that mothers and fathers may interact differently with their children depending on the gender of their offspring. Studies done by Stephens, M.A. (2009) with undergraduate students of Texas State University found that mothers on average spent more quality time with their children than fathers. Mothers were more overprotective and more caring with their children. Compared to sons, fathers were found to be more overprotective of their daughters (Larson and Richards, 1994) [11]. Saraswati *et al.* (2007) [14], conducted a study on adjustment and perception about parenting among institutional children of 10-16 years. Majority of the children perceived that their parents had rejecting attitude towards them, careless about them and were indulgent in their interpersonal relationship. Laible and Carlo, 2004 [10], thus reported that the effects that gender could have on the parent-child relationship and adolescent functioning as an important topic of enquiry.

Research on the role of gender in type of parenting practices specially in present changing Indian culture is a question now. Again research in this area is found to be quite limited. Therefore, the study attempts to examine the adolescent's gender in influencing parenting of their parents from perception of parents and from perception of adolescents.

**Objectives**

1. To study the gender differences in perception of adolescents on parenting
2. To study the gender differences in perception of parents on parenting

**Research Methods**

A total sample of 200 adolescents and their 200 parents were selected for the study. The adolescents comprising of 100 boys and 100 girls had selected from higher secondary schools and colleges from rural and urban areas of the district. Adolescents belonged to the age group of 16 -17 years who lives with their biological parents in rural or urban areas by birth were selected for the study. A parenting style questionnaire was developed to study the perception of parents and adolescents on parenting. The questionnaire was developed based on the existing parenting style questionnaire developed and used by prominent psychologist, develop mentalist and researchers. The questionnaire consisted of 32 items in four parenting style. The sub head of the parenting style questionnaire were authoritative parenting style, authoritarian parenting style, permissive parenting style and uninvolved parenting style. Responses to each statement was scored by using 5 point Likert scale. Each sub head (parenting style) had eight statement based on parental dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness. The same questionnaire was used for both adolescents and their parents. The questionnaire was also prepared in both English and vernacular language. While collecting data from adolescents the questionnaire was administered in a small group. The class room was arranged in such a way that the respondents were seated far away from each other and no consultation

between them was allowed during the time of filling up the questionnaire. Again home visit was done according to the convenient time of the parents. Both the parents were requested to sit together and then the questionnaire was administered after establishing good rapport. In many cases researcher helped the parents in responding the best suited statements.

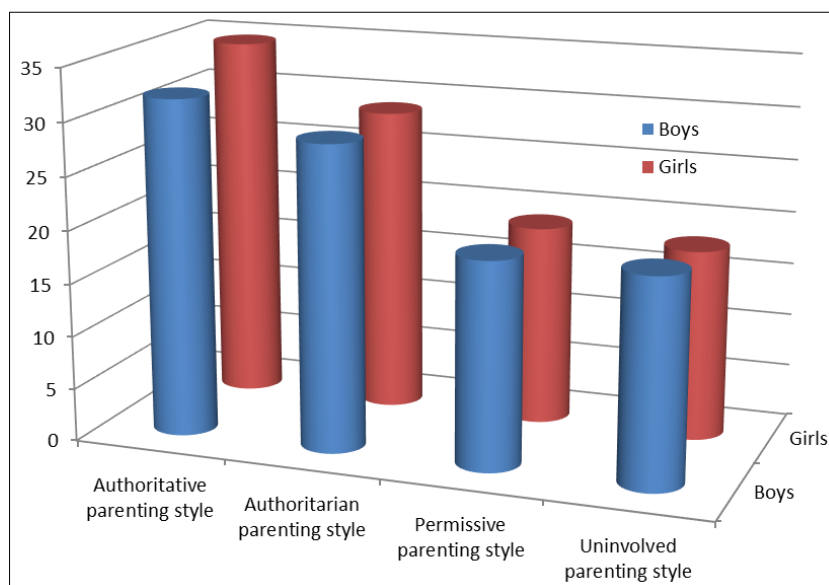
**Scoring:** Keeping the more influential parent in mind or both, the adolescents required to respond on the 5 point scale (1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neural, 4=agree and 5 = strongly agree). Parents were also requested to respond in the item on the 5-point scale which they felt deem fit on them in parenting adolescents. Scores for each subscale were taken separately. Scores for each subscale was calculated by summing the individual items comprising a sub-scale. Scores on each subscale range from 8 to 40.

**Research findings and Discussion**

To the extent that gendered parenting practices may reflect the gendered divisions and the inequities in status that exist in the larger society (Best and Williams, 1997) [3]. An attempt has been made to observe influence of gender on perception of parents and adolescents on parenting. To observe the gender differences on adolescents' perception on parenting and parents' perception on parenting, means, standard deviations were calculated and compared and independent t-test was computed for determining the differences between the groups.

**Table 1:** Gender differences in perception of adolescents on parenting

Parenting Style	Adolescent boy N=100 M ( SD )	Adolescent girl N=100 M ( SD )	Independent t- test score
Authoritative	31.87(5.17)	34.57(3.98)	5.188E-05(NS)
Authoritarian	28.82(5.46)	28.8(5.46)	0.979214(NS)
Permissive	19.55(4.11)	18.89(4.78)	0.296656(NS)
Uninvolved	19.56(4.86)	18.02(5.43)	0.035991(NS)



**Fig 1:** Gender differences in perception of adolescents on parenting

Results (Table 1, Fig. 1) reveal that girls (Mean=34.57, SD=3.98) perceived their parents' parenting style as more authoritative parenting style than boys (Mean =31.87,

SD=5.17). The result is found to be in confirmation with earlier studies which suggest that dimensions of parenting may predict self-esteem for girls and boys differently, factors

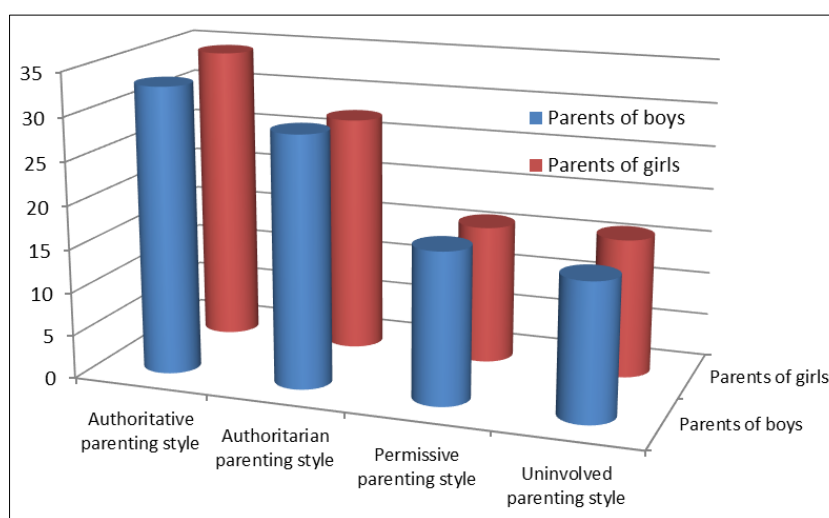
related to parent – child affiliation such as parental approval, acceptance, and support may be more strongly correlated with the self-esteem of daughters than that of sons during early and late adolescence (Buri *et al.*, 1988; Eskilson and Wiley, 1987; Gecas and Scwalbe, 1986) [4, 6, 8]. Boys perceived more permissive parenting style and uninvolved parenting style than girls. Irrespective of their gender, adolescents perceived authoritarian parenting style. Similar type of finding was reported by Kausar and Shafique (2008) [9] who found that Pakistani girls as compared to boys perceived their fathers more permissive and authoritative. On the contrary, Pakistani boys compared to girls perceived their mothers as more authoritative, but for authoritarian parenting there is no gender difference in perception of either of parents. However, it is evident from Table 1 that no significant gender difference

in adolescents' perception on their parents' parenting styles was observed. The result of the present study shows consensus with the meta analysis by Endijk *et al.* (2016) [5], based on 126 observational studies 15,034 found few differences in parental control of Boys and girls.

**Table 2:** Gender differences in Parents' perception on parenting

Parenting Style	Parents of boys N=100 M ( SD )	Parents of girls N=100 M ( SD )	Independent t- test score
Authoritative	33.07 (5.297)	34.29 (4.708)	0.08675NS
Authoritarian	28.89 (6.351481)	27.38 (6.2016)	0.090509NS
Permissive	17.43 (4.938521)	16.01 (3.893)	0.02504NS
Uninvolved	15.78 (4.477959)	16.04 (4.964)	0.69777NS

NS= Not significant



**Fig 2:** Gender differences in Parents' perception on parenting

Mean scores from Table 2 and Fig.2 reveal that parents of girls perceived more authoritative parenting style and uninvolved parenting styles where as parents of boys perceived more authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style. However, parents' perception on their own parenting was not found significant with gender of their adolescents of the present study.

The findings of the present study reveal no gender differences in parents' and adolescents' perception on parenting (Table 1; Table. 2). This study may be supported by Baruah (2015) [2] that parents from both urban and rural localities did not show any distinction between their adolescent sons and daughters and expected similar way of behaviour from both of them. Gender equality in parenting styles may be due to the influence of culture of northeast where women enjoyed greater freedom with respect to their mobility and the absence of certain practices such as dowry etc. This visible gender equality which is mostly obvious in the public sphere is most often being talked about in the context of the northeast and is often envied by the women of other regions of the country (Banerjee, 2010 and Xaxa, 2008) [1, 20].

**Conclusion**

The result of the study reveals that there are no gender differences in parenting adolescents as perceived by both parents and adolescents. Though statistically non significant, girls perceived more authoritative parenting than boys. This may be due to the fact that girls brought up in a traditional Indian society where girls are growing with more feminine

behavior and personality characteristics like calm, pretty, passive and homely which may not required authoritarian parenting. This may also reflect that traditional gender believes is still prevailing in our culture in child rearing, besides nurturing and controlling aspects of parenting behavior.

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