



Child Care Issues, Parenting Style and Youth Development in Keffi

FRANCIS A. AKWASH

Department of Psychology

Faculty of Social Sciences

Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Nigeria

Abstract:

The proximal relationship of parent to child ensures that each exerts a strong influence on the other. In caring for their children, parents influence their children through specific practices. These childcare practices go a long way to influence development even as youths. This research investigates the relationship between childcare issues, parenting style and youth anti-social behaviour. Using A sample of 44 youth volunteers living within Keffi LGA, Nasarawa State comprising males (77.3%) and females (22.7%) of which (50%) were below 15years of age, (34.1%) were between ages 15-20, and (15.9%) were above 20 years of age, (79.5%) were from nuclear families while (20.5%) were from polygamous or extended families. Children raised by permissive parents experienced more parental support (53.4%), similar to children raised by authoritarian parents (54.2%), while about (60%) of children raised by Authoritative parents reported to have experienced less parental support .Results from this study found out that parents in Nasarawa state adopt permissive (34.1%) and authoritarian (54.5%) parenting styles. As parental support increases, the level of anti-social behaviour among youths reduces, but not in all cases ($r = -.109$, $N = 44$, $df = 1$, $p = .112 > .05$). Parents are to spend time with their children right from infancy as this bond shapes the children for the rest of their lives.

Key words: child care, parenting style, permissive parents, authoritarian, authoritative parents, uninvolved parents, youth development

INTRODUCTION

Children thrive when parents provide not only affection, but also respectful communication and listening, consistent rules and expectations, and safe opportunities that promote independence. Successful parenting fosters psychological adjustment, helps children succeed in school, encourages curiosity about the world, and motivates children to achieve. It's like children have a window of opportunity when they are ready to grow in certain ways if they have the right stuff and tools in their environment. When that window closes, it will never be as easy to grow in those ways again. Behavioural theorists agree about how important it is for children to have those special stimuli at each growing stage in order to reach their milestones. Some theorists call these times critical periods, but other theorists call them sensitive periods. Increasingly common, early childhood care plays an important role in children's development and provides a valuable support to families with young children.

The rapid increase in maternal employment over the past 25 years presents Motherhood with a conflict between roles as nurturer and professional. This increase represents a dramatic shift in child rearing styles, and has prompted concerns as to whether child care poses any risks to healthy child development. From time to time children without any cognitive or physical problems at birth may not be able to develop certain milestones during the stage or time period they are most receptive. There may be an injury, illness, caregiver neglect or abuse, or a shortage of needs such as food or medical care, that make it difficult for a child to absorb all the basic building blocks and stimulation they need to gain certain

abilities at certain times in life. During the first 6 years of a child's live programming is being set. Psychologically, this programming will determine how a child deals with life, the level of confidence and how they define what love looks and feels like. The relationship between children, parents' and caretakers is single most important connection to be established.

Parents influence their children through specific practices, like breastfeeding or spanking. But parenting is more than a set of specific practices. What about the overall approach that parents take to guiding, controlling, and socializing their kids? The attitudes that parents have about their children and the resulting emotional climate that creates? It is this general pattern--this emotional climate--that researchers refer to as "parenting style" ¹. And research suggests that parenting styles have important effects on the ways that children develop. As noted by Nancy Darling and Laurence Steinberg, parenting styles are more than a set of specific practices, policies, or goals. Parenting styles are about the big picture - the kind of relationship you have with your child ². So when it comes to being diagnosed as a permissive parent, it may not matter if your family's rules are unusual or different. What really matters is whether or not you expect kids to follow the rules, and how you respond to defiance. However, in spite of the obvious contributions children may make to their own social interactions, parenting styles refer to general patterns of caregiver behavior. In a sense, a person's parenting style reflects their central tendency, the pattern they tend to gravitate toward. And so, even when circumstances are unusual we can still find consistent differences between parents in the ways they think about and treat their children.

Despite these challenges, researchers have uncovered convincing links between parenting styles and the effects these styles have on children.

THE FOUR PARENTING STYLES

1. Authoritarian Parenting: In this style of parenting, children are expected to follow the strict rules established by the parents. Failure to follow such rules usually results in punishment. Authoritarian parents fail to explain the reasoning behind these rules. If asked to explain, the parent might simply reply, "Because I said so." These parents have high demands, but are not responsive to their children. According to Baumrind (1991), these parents "are obedience-and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation".

2. Authoritative Parenting: Like authoritarian parents, those with an authoritative parenting style establish rules and guidelines that their children are expected to follow. However, this parenting style is much more democratic. Authoritative parents are responsive to their children and willing to listen to questions. When children fail to meet the expectations, these parents are more nurturing and forgiving rather than punishing,¹ suggests that these parents "monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct. They are assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive. They want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative".

3. Permissive Parenting: Permissive parents sometimes referred to as indulgent parents, have very few demands to make of their children. These parents rarely discipline their children because they have relatively low expectations of maturity and self-control. According to Baumrind, (1991) permissive parents "are more responsive than they are demanding. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid

confrontation". Permissive parents are generally nurturing and communicative with their children, often taking on the status of a friend more than that of a parent.

4. Uninvolved Parenting: An uninvolved parenting style is characterized by few demands, low responsiveness and little communication. While these parents fulfill the child's basic needs, they are generally detached from their child's life. In extreme cases, these parents may even reject or neglect the needs of their children.

Some potential causes of these differences include culture, personality, family size, parental background, socioeconomic status, educational level, and religion.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Susie Lamborn and colleagues found that adolescents with permissive parents achieved less at school and were more likely to engage in self-destructive activities, like drug or alcohol use³. Other studies suggest that adolescent boys raised by permissive parents are more likely to react with intense, negative emotions to social conflicts³. And if permissiveness is more socially acceptable, then maybe kids raised by permissive parents have an easier time fitting in.

Existing literatures imply that psychological control should have particular effects on internalized problems in children and that behavioral control should have more prominent associations with externalized problems. Psychologically controlling processes involve socialization pressure that is nonresponsive to the child's emotional and psychological needs ⁴, that stifles independent expression and autonomy, and that does not encourage interaction with others ¹. Such an environment makes it difficult for a child to develop a healthy awareness and perception of self for several reasons:

the implied derogation of the child, the lack of healthy interaction with others that is required for adequate self definition, limited opportunities to develop a sense of personal efficacy, and, particularly for adolescents, interference with the exploration needed to establish a stable identity. Psychological control has consistently been found to be correlated with patterns marked by feelings of guilt, self responsibility, confession, and indirect or non expression of aggression, dependency, alienation, social withdrawal, low ego strength, inability to make conscious choice, low self-esteem, passive, inhibited, and over controlled characteristics, and depressed affect ¹. In contrast, behavioral control is more directly linked to externalized problems. Substantial research documents a consistent relationship between insufficient behavioral control and under controlled behavior problems in children of all ages. Behaviors associated with inadequate behavioral regulation include impulsivity, aggression, delinquency, drug use, and sexual precocity ¹. Under-controlled environments do not foster self-regulation in children, often leaving them more impulsive, reckless, and more willing to take risks and violate social norms. In unregulating family environments, adolescents in particular also would be likely to be more responsive and susceptible to peer influence, which could include negative influence toward deviant behavior. Finally, it would also be possible that some unregulated adolescents intentionally "misbehave" in order to define for themselves the limits of acceptable behavior.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the parenting styles of parents in Nigeria?
2. Is there any relationship between youth antisocial behaviour and parenting style?

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

Approaching the study with the following objectives:

- To ascertain the level of anti-social behaviour among Nigerian youths.
- To investigate factors related with childcare issues.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Although both aspects of self control and social control have been noted as important predictors of delinquent behavior, only a few studies have examined them both in the same model. Chapple and colleagues (2005) examined the effects of parental factors, such as attachment and monitoring, on adolescent drug use and found that they indirectly impact an adolescent's drug use via self-control. On the other hand, Wright et al. (1999) found that social bonds largely mediated the relationship between self control and crime. However, the variables in Wright et al.'s analysis included peer, job, and partner influences in addition to family influences. Because of the inclusion of these other forms of social control, we cannot completely compare these two findings.

Hirschi's Social Control (1969) theory posits that parents can still induce a psychological presence in the minds of their children, even for children who may rank high in sensation seeking ⁵. If the individual's attachment to his/her parents Sensation Seeking Parental Monitoring Marijuana Initiation 24 is strong, and conscious thought is given to his/her parent's reaction to any deviant behavior, there should be some constraint exhibited.

BEHAVIORAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Behavioral theories of child development focus on how environmental interaction influences behavior and are based

upon the theories of theorists such as John B. Watson, Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. These theories deal only with observable behaviors. Development is considered a reaction to rewards, punishments, stimuli and reinforcement. This theory differs considerably from other child development theories because it gives no consideration to internal thoughts or feelings. Instead, it focuses purely on how experience shapes who we are. According to this theory, certain behaviors can be elicited by a neutral (normally unstimulating) stimulus simply because of its learned association with a more powerful stimulus.

HUMANISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Humanistic theories focus on the individual's own subjective experiences, motives, and desires. In general, they differ from psychoanalytic views in putting much less emphasis on the role of the unconscious in determining behavior. Humanists argue that we are not driven by unconscious needs, neither are we driven by external environmental pulls such as reinforcement and rewards. Rather, humans have free will and are motivated to fulfill their potential. The inner need or desire to fulfill one's potential is known as self-actualization. The drive for self-actualization is not restricted to childhood but is applicable across the lifespan. Development itself is multifaceted and all aspects of change are integrally linked.

Stability versus Change

It is often claimed that “the child is father to the man” (or “the child is mother to the woman”), meaning that early experiences influence current and later development. This view suggests that certain aspects of children’s development display stability, in the sense that they are consistent and predictable across time. It turns out that development is characterized by both stability and change – for example, personality characteristics

such as shyness and the tendency to be aggressive tend to be stable, while others such as approach (the tendency to extreme friendliness and lack of caution with strangers) and sluggishness (reacting passively to changing circumstances) are unstable

Theory of Cognitive Development, and included four stages: Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete Operational, and Formal Operational.

- **Sensorimotor Stage** occurs from Birth - 2 years. During this stage children experience the world through their senses and actions such as touching, looking, etc. Once the child accomplishes the milestones of Object Permanence (i.e., the knowledge that an object exists even when hidden from view) and Stranger Anxiety they've successfully completed this stage and move to the next stage.
- **Preoperational Stage** occurs from 2 years - 6 years. During this stage, children are able to represent the world with words and images, but they're still not able to use true logical reasoning. Developmental milestones are pretending and egocentrism.
- **Concrete Operational Stage** occurs from 7 years - 11 years. During this stage, children learn Conservation: that the quantity of concrete materials (objects, liquids) remains constant even if the organization and/or shape changes . For example, pouring liquid into glasses of different sizes does not change the amount of liquid. In other words, they learn that a change in shape does not mean there's a change in quantity or volume.
- **Formal Operational Stage** occurs from ~12 year through adulthood. During this stage, children learn to use abstract reasoning. This is a major step as reasoning now goes beyond the concrete (requiring actual experience) to abstract thinking that involves symbols

and imagination. A milestone at this stage is the potential for moral reasoning.

Just like Piaget believed we pass through stages of cognitive development, Erik Erikson stated that children pass through stages of psychosocial development. Each stage of development has a specific conflict (the conflict is also the name of the stage) that the child has to overcome before moving to the next stage. If a child is unable to successfully overcome a particular conflict, the child will remain stuck at that stage until he or she is able to resolve that issue. The stages of Erikson's psychosocial development are as follows:

- **Trust vs. Mistrust** (this is the stage and the conflict) occurs from birth to 1 year. To resolve this conflict, the child must develop a sense of security
- **Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt** occurs from age 1 - 2. To resolve the conflict, the child must achieve a sense of independence
- **Initiative vs. Guilt** occurs from age 3 - 5. To resolve this conflict, the child must find a balance between restraint and being spontaneous (can't just do everything want whenever they want)
- **Industry vs. Inferiority** occurs from age 6 through puberty. To resolve this conflict, the child must develop a sense of self-confidence
- **Identity vs. Role Confusion** occurs through adolescence. To resolve the conflict, the adolescent experiences a unified sense of self
- **Intimacy vs. Isolation** occurs from puberty to young adulthood. To resolve the conflict, the young adult must form close personal relationships with others
- **Generativity vs. Stagnation** occurs through middle adulthood. To resolve the conflict, the adult must learn to promote the well-being of others and not be focused completely on themselves

- **Integrity vs. Despair** occurs through late adulthood. At this stage, the adult enjoys a sense of satisfaction with themselves and life by reflecting on a well-lived life
- Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space^{6,7}.
- Attachment does not have to be reciprocal. One person may have an attachment to an individual which is not shared. Attachment is characterized by specific behaviors in children, such as seeking proximity with the attachment figure when upset or threatened⁷.
- Attachment behavior in adults towards the child includes responding sensitively and appropriately to the child's needs. Such behavior appears universal across cultures. Attachment theory provides an explanation of how the parent-child relationship emerges and influences subsequent development.

Attachment Theory

Within attachment theory, *attachment* means "a biological instinct in which proximity to an attachment figure is sought when the child senses or perceives threat or discomfort. Attachment behaviour anticipates a response by the attachment figure which will remove threat or discomfort".

Essentially, attachment depends on the person's ability to develop basic trust in their caregivers and self. In infants, attachment as a motivational and behavioral system directs the child to seek proximity with a familiar caregiver when they are alarmed, with the expectation that they will receive protection and emotional support. The most important tenet of attachment theory is that an infant needs to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for the child's successful social and emotional development, and in particular for learning how to effectively regulate their feelings. Fathers or any other individuals, are equally likely to become principal attachment figures if they provide most of the child care and related social

interaction. In the presence of a sensitive and responsive caregiver, the infant will use the caregiver as a "safe base" from which to explore.

Four different attachment classifications have been identified in children: secure attachment, anxious-ambivalent attachment, anxious-avoidant attachment, and disorganized attachment. Attachment theory has become the dominant theory used today in the study of infant and toddler behavior and in the fields of infant mental health, treatment of children, and related fields. Secure attachment is when children feel they can rely on their caregivers to attend to their needs of proximity, emotional support and protection. It is considered to be the best attachment style According to some psychological researchers, a child becomes securely attached when the parent is available and able to meet the needs of the child in a responsive and appropriate manner. At infancy and early childhood, if parents are caring and attentive towards their children, those children will be more prone to secure attachment. Separation anxiety is what infants feel when they are separated from their caregivers. Anxious-ambivalent attachment is when the infant feels separation anxiety when separated from his caregiver and does not feel reassured when the caregiver returns to the infant. Anxious-avoidant attachment is when the infant avoids their parents. Disorganized attachment is when there is a lack of attachment behavior. In the 1980s, the theory was extended to attachment in adults. Attachment applies to adults when adults feel close attachment to their parents and their romantic partners.

Recent studies in attachment have also discovered the impact of a chemical in the brain called oxytocin. Researchers found that higher levels of oxytocin were correlated with feelings of well-being and security in relationships. They also found that oxytocin was released in both an infant and mother's brain during closeness and cuddling. This oxytocin also strengthened the attachment of the mother and child.

Therefore, scientists have hypothesized that this early imprinting of oxytocin in the reward centers of the brain could also lead to future attachment styles as an adult. Researchers found that those people who did not experience secure attachments as infants, had more difficulty with relationships as adults and also a less developed reward system in the brain.

Theorists who support sensitive periods believe that while it will be far more difficult for the child and the child's teachers and caregivers to learn what was not learned during the window of opportunity, these children can still develop the missing capacities and skills later than they did not develop earlier. While some children do seem to get stuck permanently, there is evidence to support the sensitive period idea as well. Some children born in the same understaffed orphanages who are later adopted do go on to learn to love, to trust, and to show affection to their family and friends.

HYPOTHESIS

H_1 – there would be a significant relationship between parental support and youth misconduct behaviour.

METHOD

Design

This study adopted a 2×2 design, having one independent variable; parental support and one dependent variable; anti-social behaviour among youths.

Population

The population used for this study, were youths from keffi local government area in Nasarawa state. A sample of 44 youth volunteers living within Keffi LGA was randomly selected. The participants comprised of both males (77.3%) and females (22.7%) of which (50%) were below 15years of age, (34.1%) were

between ages 15-20, and (15.9%) were above 20 years of age. (79.5%) were from nuclear families while (20.5%) were from polygamous or extended families.

Procedure

Participants completed the administered questionnaires and they were assured of confidentiality of their responses by the researcher, after which the collected data was coded for statistical analysis using SPSS 17. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to ascertain the relationship between parental support and general misconduct behaviour.

DATA ANALYSIS

Results

Table 1 Distribution of parenting style and parental support in Frequency and Percentage

	Parental Support				Total
	Less	%	More	%	
Permissive	7	46.6	8	53.4	15
Parenting Style Authoritarian	11	45.8	13	54.2	24
Authoritative	3	60.0	2	40.0	5
Total	21		23		44

Table 1 above shows that children raised by permissive parents experienced more (53.4%) parental support, similar to children raised by authoritarian parents (54.2%). Unlike children raised by Authoritative parents who (60%) reported to have experienced less parental support.

Table 2 Correlation showing relationship between Parental Support and Anti-Social behaviour

	Parental Support		Total	R	df	Sig
	Less	More				
Anti-Social Low Behaviour	12	15	27			
High	9	8	17	-.109	1	.483
Total	21	23	44			

Table 2 above shows a negative relationship between parental support and anti-social behaviour among youths. However, this relationship is weak and insignificant ($r = -.109$, $N = 44$, $df = 1$, $p = .112 > .05$). Therefore the alternate hypothesis would be rejected.

DISCUSSION

Results from this current study shows that as parental support increased the level of anti-social behaviour among youths reduces, but not in all cases ($r = -.109$, $N = 44$, $df = 1$, $p = .112 > .05$). This result however, is not at a statically significant level. This result is in tandem results from Stephen Scott, Moira Doolan, Celia Beckett, Séan Harry and Sally Cartwright (2012) where Child antisocial behaviour problems were found to be clearly associated with negative parenting, maternal depression and stress, and partner violence. When negative parenting and one of these other factors was present, the chance of the child having severe antisocial behaviour problems was tripled. Child inattention and restlessness further increased the chances of antisocial behaviour. In contrast, socio-demographic factors were not associated with increased rates of child antisocial behaviour. The proximal relationship of parent to child ensures that each exerts a strong influence on the other. Additionally, the coercive nature of this interaction results in an increased risk of scholastic difficulties when negative spiral patterns of reinforcement, involving both the parent and the child, go unchallenged (Taylor and Biglan 1998). Patterson (1995) found that these patterns, when established in a coercive family environment, result in an escalation of negative behaviour on the part of the child, which in turn reinforces the parent's withdrawal and harshness towards the child, as well as the child's problematic behaviour⁸. Therefore, parents who are inconsistent in their approach towards their child can unintentionally promote negative child behaviour, which can

lead to a mutual escalation into negative behaviour from both ⁹. Parenting involves behavioural control, and behavioral control is more directly linked to externalized problems. Substantial research documents a consistent relationship between insufficient behavioral control and undercontrolled behavior problems in children of all ages. Behaviors associated with inadequate behavioral regulation include impulsivity, aggression, delinquency, drug use, and sexual precocity¹. Under-controlled environments do not foster self-regulation in children, often leaving them more impulsive, reckless, and more willing to take risks and violate social norms. In unregulating family environments, adolescents in particular also would be likely to be more responsive and susceptible to peer influence, which could include negative influence toward deviant behavior. Finally, it would also be possible that some unregulated adolescents intentionally "misbehave" in order to define for themselves the limits of acceptable behavior.

Results from this study found out that most parents in Nasarawa state adopts permissive (34.1%) and authoritarian (54.5%) parenting style. Susie Lamborn and colleagues found that adolescents with permissive parents achieved less at school and were more likely to engage in self-destructive activities, like drug or alcohol use (Lamborn et al 1991). Other studies suggest that adolescent boys raised by permissive parents are more likely to react with intense, negative emotions to social conflicts (Miller et al 2002). Permissive parents, sometimes referred to as indulgent parents, have very few demands to make of their children. These parents rarely discipline their children because they have relatively low expectations of maturity and self-control. According to¹, permissive parents "are more responsive than they are demanding. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation". Permissive parents are generally nurturing and communicative with their children, often taking on the status of

a friend more than that of a parent. Permissive parenting often results in children who rank low in happiness and self-regulation. These children are more likely to experience problems with authority and tend to perform poorly in school. Authoritarian parents expect children to follow the strict rules established by them. Failure to follow such rules usually results in punishment. Authoritarian parents fail to explain the reasoning behind these rules. If asked to explain, the parent might simply reply, "Because I said so." These parents have high demands, but are not responsive to their children. According to Baumrind (1991), these parents "are obedience-and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation". Authoritarian parenting styles generally lead to children who are obedient and proficient, but they rank lower in happiness, social competence and self-esteem¹⁰.

REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1991). Attachments and other affectional bonds across the life cycle. In C. M. Parkes, J. Stevenson-Hinde, & P. Marris (Eds.), *Attachment across the life cycle* (pp. 33-51). London: Routledge. [6]
- Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *Journal of Early Adolescence* 11, 56-95. [1]
- Bowlby J. (1969). *Attachment. Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Loss.* New York: Basic Books.[7]
- Hirschi, T. (1969). Causes of Delinquency. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. [5]
- Maccohy, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. In E. M. Hetherington (Ed.), P. H. Mussen (Series Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4.* (pp. 1-101). New York: Wiley. [4]

- McKee, L., Colletti, C., Rakow, A., Jones, D. J., & Forehand, R. (2008). Parenting and child externalizing behaviors: *Monograph*, 4, 1-103. [2]
- Peterson, G. W. (1995). Autonomy and connected- ness in families. In R. D. Day, K. R. Gilbert, B. H. Settles, & W. R. Burr (Eds.), *Research and theory in family science* (pp. 20- 41). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole. [8]
- Rothbaum, F., & Weisz, J. (1994). Parental Caregiving and Child Externalizing Behavior in Nonclinical Samples: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 55-74. [10]
- Rutter, M., Bishop, D., Pine, D., Scott, S., Stevenson, J., Taylor, E., et al. (2008). Rutter's Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Fifth Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. [9]
- Wagner, E. F., 1996. "Substance Use and Violent Behaviour in Adolescents". *Aggression and Violence Behaviour* 1(4): 375-387. [3]