



## Parenting style and adolescent suicide ideation: A review

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### Abstract

Suicide among adolescents has become a serious worldwide problem. With increasing competition, confusion and complexities in relationships, present day adolescents find it difficult to adjust to all the uncertainties of life. The purpose of this review is to understand the impact of parenting styles on adolescents' suicide ideation. The prior researches provide evidence that suicide ideation is significantly related to authoritarian parenting, low parental warmth, over control, overprotection, negative family climate and not taking suicidal thoughts and attempts seriously. Authoritative parenting and positive family climate act as a buffer against developing suicide ideation among adolescents. Permissive and uninvolved parenting was associated with negative suicide ideation. Inadequate parenting styles are strongly associated with suicidality among adolescents both directly and indirectly due to their relation to other risk factors. The aim is to bring into light this important subject as India has one of the world's highest suicide rates for youth.

**Keywords:** parenting style, suicide ideation, adolescence, children

### Introduction

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data of the year 2015, every hour, a student commits suicide in India. In 2015, 7940 adolescents of 14-18 years of age committed suicide. The number of adolescents that took away their lives during the five years leading 2015 was 39,775. The number of attempted suicides, many of which go unreported, is likely to be much higher. According to the WHO's report titled 'Mental Health Status of Adolescents in South East Asia- Evidence for Action', the suicide rate per 100,000 population in 10-19 age-group is 35.5 in India. This report covers ten nations of the region, including India. The adolescents in this report are defined as children and youth who are 10-19 years of age. Suicide has been found as the second leading cause of death in the 15-19 age group in these 10 nations. The youngsters find it demanding to cope with failure in exams, career, relationships and other aspects of life. Family, society or any social institution does not seem to offer sufficient support or solace.

The world is full of complications and competition, particularly for the adolescents. Adolescence is a phase of human growth and development that takes place between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as any individuals with age 10 to 19. According to Indian Census 2011, every fifth individual is an adolescent in India. Adolescence is a stage where the children try to pursue new things and accumulate new experiences. Adolescents undergo major transformations in their propensity to evaluate and understand intricate situations and they aspire to become autonomous and eccentric individuals (Stang & Story, 2005) [79]. This phase of transformation brings about various desires, difficulties and responsibilities in addition to manifold changes in different aspects of the personality of the adolescents. These changes

could also result in emotional vulnerability, anxiety and a number of other pessimistic emotions in them. However, the adolescents are often in a chaotic state in their quest for self-identity and stature of their lives. They are recurrently in disarray with the right and wrong orientation of life. The relationship between parent and child is amongst the most prominent factors, which affects the social interactions, education, nutrition and problematic behaviors of the adolescents (Hair, Jager & Garrett, 2002) [45].

The basic responsibility of the parents is to mold and shape their children into adults by virtue of their guidance (Baumrind, 1971). The relationship of parents and children is associated with self-confidence, empathy and harmonious personality (Barber & Erickson, 2001; Hair *et al.*, 2002) [6, 45]. The way adolescents are brought up plays a paramount role in influencing and anticipating their behavior. The equilibrium of the family is disrupted when a child enters the adolescence due to the transformations in the behavior of one or more family members or in the circumstances of the family. Abrupt mood swings do strike the mind of adolescents, but hormonal changes are not entirely responsible for their behavior. The state of mind of the adolescents is concomitant with their behaviors, companions, and other circumstantial factors, which suggest that adolescents may be more temperamental than adults as their activities and circumstances are changed more often when compared with the adults.

### Parenting Styles

Parenting is the process of assisting and encouraging the physical, emotional, social and mental growth of a child from birth to adulthood. It is a way through which relationship between parent and child is reflected. Parenting is an intricate process that involves much more than a mother or father providing food, safety and support for the child. It is an

intricate activity, which encompasses various explicit attitudes and behaviors that work independently and collectively in child outcomes and builds an emotional connection where the behavior of parents is communicated (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Darling, 1999) [26, 25]. Therefore, parenting as the style of raising a child refers to an entitlement or responsibility of mother and father, together or separately to groom the child for society and culture (Veenes, 1973a) [84]. Consequently, every parent has a unique attitude, behavior, belief, values and family culture and all these standards differ from parent to parent (Bibi, Chaudhry, Awan & Tariq, 2013) [13].

Parenting style is a term referred to behaviors and strategies used by parents to regulate and socialize their children (Lightfoot, Cole & Cole, 2009) [54]. Darling and Steinberg (1993) [26] have defined parenting style as “a constellation of attitudes towards the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parent’s behaviors are expressed” (p.493). Parenting style is usually conceptualized along two dimensions: parental demand (e.g. control) and parental response (e.g. warmth). Diana Baumrind is the pioneer amongst the researchers who have classically studied educational approaches of raising children. The conceptualization of parenting style has presented a stable portrayal of different type of parenting style, which has facilitated the inherent growth of a child (Baumrind, 1967) [7]. As an interaction between the two dimensions of parental demandingness and responsiveness, Baumrind (1971) has classified parenting styles as authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting.

#### **Authoritative styles**

The authoritative parents maintain equilibrium between the levels of responsiveness and demandingness. They discipline the children, according to age pertinent manners.

They make rational requests, form a loving and solicitous ambience in which children can communicate their feelings, opinions, extend their points of view and partake in decision-making processes of the family. Parents with authoritative parenting style tend to establish clear instructions and expectations for their children, while giving lots of nurturing and love. They expect consistency with rules, but can be adjustable too (Berg, 2011).

#### **Authoritarian style**

The authoritarian parents usually set stringent rules and monitor their child’s time along with their day and night movements (Areepattamannil, 2010) [4]. Furthermore, the parents with authoritarian style are avert to any discussion between parents and children, which brings further burden on children. Authoritarian parenting style is a restrictive punitive style where parents admonish the child to abide by regulations, appreciate their efforts, set rigid limits and restrictions on the child and permit a small amount of verbal interactions (Santrock, 2008) [74].

#### **Permissive style**

Permissive parents exercise little control on their children and the intention is to provide a high level of warmth to the children. Punishment is seldomly used in permissive style and children are generally given the immense amount of liberty to

take their own decisions in life (Kang & Moore, 2011). They are more responsive, set very few rules and to some extent have low expectations for their children. They usually have a very improvised and nonchalant approach regarding their children (Verenikina, Vialle & Lysaght, 2011), have open conversations and consequently develop amiable relationships.

#### **Suicide Ideation**

Suicide takes place throughout the lifespan. It is the second leading antecedent of death among 15-29 year olds universally. According to Borges and Werlang (2006) [14], self-directed violence becomes more apparent amid the ages of 15 and 19, which makes it the second reason for death amongst this age group in the world. Suicidal ideation (SI) is a term, which ascribes to the thoughts a person has about taking his or her own life, with some degree of intent. While an individual may experience suicidal thoughts, it does not mean he or she is in impending danger of committing suicide.

Marcelli and Braconnier (1989) [56] believed that suicide ideation during adolescence surfaces as a way to “escape”; adolescents seem to think that ending their own life can rescue them from circumstances that they feel are intolerable. Suicide ideation is defined as the manifestation of ideas and/or desires to end their own life, and in such individuals, the innate severity of the suicide is high. The literature suggests that the suicidal cognitions may be discerned as a constant substitute in a situation of tremendous stress and emotional imbalance at any point of life (e.g., Borges & Werlang, 2006; Donath, Graessel, Baier, Bleich and Hillemacher, 2014) [14, 29].

The concept of “suicidality” is referred to thoughts and plans of suicide, suicide attempts and completed suicide, and hence incorporates a comprehensive range of phenomena. A concept corresponding to “suicidality” is “suicidal behavior” (which implies acts as well as thoughts). “Suicidal ideation” refers to suicidality without action, which includes all kinds of suicidal thoughts and schemes. A “suicide attempt” can be referred to an unsuccessful suicide and it also constitutes intentional acts of lower fatality and intention. According to Michel and Valach (2001) [61], the “suicidal process” refers to the evolvement of suicidality over time, which begins with suicide ideation. Generally, the process is characterized as comprising of suicide ideation, more precise suicide plans, and suicide execution or action: attempted and completed suicide.

Various researches have analyzed the prevalence, correlates and etiology of suicidal behaviors among youngsters during recent years (Garland & Zigler, 1993; Beautrais, 1999; Gould & Kramer, 2001) [39, 10, 42]. It may be asserted that amongst the people who suffer from depressive disorders, those who attempt suicide are distinguished by the potentiality of other factors such as social, family and personal factors which may instigate them to engage in suicide related behaviors when they are dispirited. For instance, subjection to sexual abuse during childhood has been found to intensify the risk of suicidal behavior (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999) [32] and therefore subjection to sexual agony in childhood might elevate vulnerability to suicidal behaviors among depressed people in old age.

Five psychological constructs that have steadily been correlated with suicide are impulsivity/aggression, depression,

anxiety, hopelessness, and self-consciousness/social disengagement (Conner, Duberstein, Conwell, Seidnitz, & Caine, 2001) <sup>[21]</sup>. Hopelessness is specified as a belief that condition of life will not recuperate, and such a belief forecasts consequent suicide among suicidal ideators (Beck, Steer, Kovacs, & Garrison, 1985; Cole, 1989; Freeman & Reinecke, 1993; Weishaar & Beck, 1990) <sup>[88]</sup>. The risk factors for suicidal ideation, plan and attempt are intricate, and comprise of biological, psychological, social and cultural factors (Shtayermman, Reilly & Knight, 2012; Whatley and Clopton, 1992) <sup>[77, 89]</sup>. Parental status has also been found to be involved in suicide behaviors (Qin and Mortensen, 2003) <sup>[70]</sup>.

### Parenting Style and Suicide Ideation

It is a well-registered fact that psychosocial and circumstantial aspects can either infuriate or diminish known intrapersonal risk factors for suicidal behavior. The literature related to parenting and youth suicide-pertinent behaviors is limited, but fairly consistent. Numerous investigations advance that parent-adolescent disagreement is an important risk factor and on the contrary, parental affection is a shielding factor (Beautrais, Joyce, Mulder, Fergusson & Nightingale, 1996; Connor and Rueter, 2006; Martin and Waite, 1994) <sup>[9, 22, 57]</sup>. It was found in a study that parenting styles were remarkably associated with suicidal ideation in Hong Kong adolescents (Lai and McBride-Chang, 2001) <sup>[52]</sup>. Low warmth or discouraging communication in a parent child relationship has been associated with higher rates of suicidal acts among adolescents (Connor and Rueter 2006; Prinstein, Boergers, Spirito, Little & Grapentine, 2000) <sup>[22, 69]</sup>. Similarly, various concurrent and retrospective studies have observed that suicidal behavior is related to uncaring and delicate parent-child relationships (Adams, Overholser, & Lehnert, 1994) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Adverse or antagonistic parenting, usually a characteristic of authoritarian parenting, has been related with suicidal actions prospectively, concurrently, and retrospectively in the adolescents (Fergusson, Woodward & Horwood, 2000; Gau, Chiu, Soong, & Lee, 2008) <sup>[33]</sup>. Kwok and Shek (2010) <sup>[51]</sup> recounted that boosting warmth in parent and adolescent communication was negatively correlated with suicide ideation, therefore it seemed to serve as a barrier against suicidal behaviors. It was also found that mother-adolescent communication was more strongly related to suicidal ideation as compared to the father-adolescent communication. Among Australian adolescents, the risk of suicidal ideation firmly grows with increasing conflicts with parents, that the adolescents recounted having during the previous thirty days. In a representative written survey of 44,610 students, it was found that parenting style plays an important role. While children with Authoritative parents gain benefits while children of Rejecting-Neglecting parents face disadvantages – as it was visible in the case of adolescent suicide attempts. Authoritarian parenting demonstrated in the form of low parental warmth and high maternal control is linked with higher suicide ideation among the adolescents (Donath *et al.*, 2014) <sup>[29]</sup>. This study is assisted by another study from Australia in which adolescents whose parents are exceptionally controlling and show less warmth (i.e., Authoritarian parenting) are at double risk of suicidal ideation and have three times more risk of eliciting intentional self-

harm. It has also been apprehended that hostile behavior of parents is related to suicidal behaviors, especially in case of boys, where it has been observed that incidents of parental violence predict suicide attempts. Wichstrom (1995) <sup>[91]</sup> presented in a predictor analysis that parental attachment worked as an insulating factor against suicidal attempts. Moreover, it has also expounded from the findings of Lai & McBride-Chang (2001) <sup>[52]</sup> that adolescents with an authoritarian mother and father, low parental warmth and negative family climate had significantly higher suicide ideation.

Improper parenting styles, either overindulging or insufficient attention and deficient family functioning remarkably intensifies the possibility of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Gau *et al.*, 2008 established that when adolescents described their parents as showing the requisite care and affection, the risk of suicide was alleviated and when parents were recognized watchful or authoritarian, the risk of suicides increased significantly. The study brings into light the fact that maternal parenting is substantially important and that paternal parenting plays a pivotal role in determining suicidal risk in children. Still, mothers were widely discerned as more caring and were rated higher on the overprotection and authoritarian control dimension when compared to the fathers, implying strong foundation of emotional spirit in the mother-child relationship than in the father-child relationship.

A study conducted by Park, Schepp, Jang, & Koo (2006) <sup>[66]</sup> demonstrated that parental abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect considerably predicted suicidal ideation in high school students. When the communication between children and parents is unbarred and positive, suicidal thoughts diminish. This is especially in the case of positive mother-child communication. Even though some researchers assert that authoritarian parenting style may have a more positive implication of parental care in Chinese culture than it does in Western culture (e.g., Chao, 1994) <sup>[17]</sup>. However, Chen, Dong, and Zhou (1997) <sup>[18]</sup> have laid out that authoritarian parenting is related to negative social consequences in Mainland Chinese children. They claim that authoritarian parenting style, even in Chinese conditions; have negative, power absolute control. Chinese adolescents who perceived their mothers as less warm and loving had an inclination to suffer from immense suicidal ideation, with girls usually recounting higher levels of suicidal ideation than boys do.

Contrarily, investigators noticed that suicide ideation among the adolescents reduced roughly in half in youngsters who proclaimed more care of the mother or father (Toumbourou and Gregg, 2002) <sup>[88]</sup>. Parenting styles have the ability to aggravate the relationship between depression and aggressive behavior and reported suicide prospects in children admitted for inpatient psychiatric care (Greening, Stoppelbein, Luebbe & Fite, 2010) <sup>[43]</sup>. As opposed to the belief, authoritarian parenting appeared to modulate the relationship between depression and suicide risk. With the increase in authoritarian parenting style, the interconnection between depression and suicide risk decreased.

Israeli girls who were admitted in the emergency ward for self-poisoning had more disposition to report their mothers as authoritarian (Diamond, Didner, Waniel & Priel, (2005) <sup>[28]</sup>. It has been established by research that the only constituents of

parenting, which speculate lifetime suicide attempts were unresponsiveness and refusal. Nevertheless, this link was recognized only in females and no relation was observed in the males (Ehnvall, Parker, Hadzi-Pavlovic & Malhi, 2008) <sup>[31]</sup>. Gender of the participants remarkably modulated the relationships between variables of parenting and suicide attempts and this connection was reckoned by IPTS variables. The ramification of parental solace on suicide attempts was twice as influential, especially among the girls. On the contrary, the repercussion of boundaries set by parents on suicide attempts was notable in case of males, but not among the females, and could be moderated as a result of vulnerability to violence. Authoritarian parenting is distinguishing feature of family environments where comparatively more Hispanic females attempt suicide. Findings emphasize prospective mechanisms through which parenting style might affect gender differences in suicide-related behaviors of the adolescents and that certain parenting practices are related to decrease in suicide attempts among the adolescents (Selfian & Sifers, 2013) <sup>[15]</sup>. In a study, which was conducted in Chile, comparatively weak association was found between parenting styles and suicidal ideation.

The parental practice of indulgence in the context of nuclear family might result in depression and suicide among children. Parental indiscretion has been linked to production of suicidal children. Suicide prevention efforts take a back seat due to risky parenting practices as the parents observe that it is burdensome to handle the materialistic needs of youngsters in the modern age of consumerism. The Consumeristic child-rearing pattern has increased the risk of suicides in children in India. Increase in purchases of materialistic things signify transcendence in ideas about parental investment, value and potential danger. (Allison, 2006; Anagnost 2008) <sup>[2, 3]</sup>. Indulgent parenting acts as a catalyst in creating the causing suicidal crisis in Kerala and reformed family system comprising of socialization and management can help in developing ant suicidal behavior (see Donzelot 1979; Rose 1996) <sup>[30]</sup>. Indian studies conducted in community and clinical settings have found that poor emotional support, parental neglect, and abuse (especially physical and sexual) is associated with suicidal behavior (Logaraj, Ethirajan, Felix & Roseline, 2005; Paradkar and Rao, 2006; Pillai, Andrews & Patel, 2008; Sidhartha and Jena, 2006) <sup>[55, 67, 68, 78]</sup>.

## Discussion

The analysis of the literature on the relationship between parenting style and suicide ideation has disclosed that parenting style plays an instrumental role in the suicidal ideation of adolescents. Developmental psychologists profusely recommend authoritative parenting as the ideal style of parenting for rearing the adolescents (Steinberg, 2001) <sup>[81]</sup>. The authoritative style of parenting which incorporates parental surveillance and guidance aids adolescents' subjection to constructive activities and minimizes the scope of becoming involved in antisocial and dangerous activities (Wargo, 2007) <sup>[87]</sup>. The findings have imparted to the understanding of certain parenting styles that are partially correlated with suicidal behavior and suicide ideation. It has also expanded existing literature by examining the potential

predictor path to suicidality via parenting style and life ideations, and strengthened the knowledge of youngsters' perception of parenting behavior.

Studies have revealed that children raised in authoritative families are assessed by objective measures as socially competent to a greater extent (Connor & Rueter, 2006) <sup>[22]</sup>. It was observed in the study that the authoritative parenting style had a positive and partial correlation with positive suicidal ideation in the life of the adolescents. These results have extended further support to Baumrind's concept of parenting styles which describes the authoritative parenting style as being related to greater social and emotional development attributes in youngsters (Kremers, Brug, Vries & Engels, 2003; McClun & Merrell, 1998; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan & Evans, 2006) <sup>[49, 58, 71]</sup>. Besides that, the authoritative parenting style has a partial negative correlation with suicidality. It highlighted that young individuals who were raised in families with high responsiveness and negotiable demandingness, are less plausible to involve themselves in suicide related behaviors. Some findings regarding authoritarian parenting style do not suggest any foreseeable life outcomes. These studies do not signify a risk; nor do they provide a vigilant role against suicidality. Researchers generally regard authoritarian parenting style as a negative parenting style.

Parents whose parenting style constitutes of authoritative parental attributes like assertiveness which is non-invasive and non-restrictive, are advocated to continue adhering it and convince other parents to follow such practice. The authoritative parenting style provides a positive climate in the family and this knowledge should be shared in relevant suicide prevention programs or seminars as it serves as a buffer against suicidal behavior by inculcating youth positive thinking in the lives of the individuals. However, permissive parental characteristics like leniency and consenting need to be indispensably adopted by parents in particular contexts, especially when their children preoccupied with negative suicide ideation.

Suicide cases are generally under reported due to lack of healthy registration systems, or because of the stigma that exists against the individuals who attempt suicide and their families. The actual number of suicide cases appear to be even more as it has been interpreted as one of the distinguished triggers of death particularly in young population of the world. The risk factors leading to completed and attempted suicide usually resemble in youngsters and they comprise interpersonal dispute, unsettled grief, family insecurity, depression, alcohol abuse or dependence, unemployment, and family history of psychiatric disorder (Kirmayer, 1994) <sup>[48]</sup>. Darling and Steinberg (1993) <sup>[26]</sup> have identified in their integrative model that certain parenting behaviors are commonly used by parents of the three different parenting styles. However, the most significant thing is the way the adolescents perceive the attitude, behavior and the intentions of the parents.

From the current review, it could be understood that parenting style plays a significant role in developing suicidal ideation among the adolescents. Authoritative and permissive parenting style is better style for the parents to adopt as compared to the authoritarian parenting style in order to

prevent suicide ideation and attempts in their children. Young individuals who suffer from risk of attempting suicide want their parents to listen to them. They long for comfort and reassurance from the parents that their feelings regarding suicide are normal, reasonable and manageable. Parents need to tell the kids that they have something precious to live for (Waldvogel, Rueter & Oberg, 2008) <sup>[90]</sup>. Family cohesion works as a defense measure for suicidal behaviors and it has been already established that family dysfunction and lack of family support is a potential risk factor for suicide among youths. Instead, parenting practices comprising of permissive characteristics are more probable to reduce negative impact of suicidal tendencies. Positive parental attributes could also be articulated in family-suicide intervention strategies to minimize the negative or hopeless thoughts that young individuals hold towards their future lives.

### Directions for future research

Good parenting approach has always been the topic of debate for researchers as well as for the common people. Healthy and positive parenting behavior is an irreplaceable gift that a parent can bestow. It is very essential for the parents to nurture children into individuals who are humane. It is indispensable for the researchers to analyze the impact of parenting style. Modern competitive and challenging world has diminished the determination of people to live life, leading to suicide ideation, thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, it is highly recommended that researchers carry out more studies to study the relationship between parenting style and suicide ideation as the number of suicides amongst the adolescents have increased.

It is also suggested that future researches need to be administered with consideration of parents' age, educational level, socioeconomic status, family size, and parental background, while studying the relationship of parenting style and suicide ideation of adolescents. Perception of parents as rejecting/neglectful was associated with lifetime suicide attempts, especially in case of females (Ehnvall *et al.*, 2008). Such researches arouse the need of gender specific studies regarding suicidal ideation and attempts among adolescents. Suicide ideation and behaviors vary across cultures. Therefore, there is need to study the relationship between suicide ideation and parenting styles not only across various cultures but also among different sub-groups of the same culture. It would help in understanding the reason behind suicidal ideation and tendencies. Thus, such studies may help in prevention of suicides and saving lives of the adolescents.

This study reviewed a limited number of studies and researches. Very few researches have been conducted in India on the relationship of parenting style and suicide ideation. Adolescence is a vulnerable phase of life of an individual; it is difficult for the adolescents to take control of the ideas that come to mind. They perceive the world differently when compared with their parents. This is generally apparent while analyzing the reports of adolescents and the parents on monitoring behavior of the parents (De Los Reyes, 2013). Researchers need to carry out more researches in this field, as a large number of adolescents are committing suicide in India.

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