

Authoritarian Parenting Style and Its Relationship with Child Development: A Study of Families in Semarang, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between authoritarian parenting and child development among families in Semarang, Indonesia. Using a cross-sectional quantitative approach, 60 parents of children aged 3–7 years were surveyed through a Likert-scale questionnaire grounded in Baumrind's parenting style theory and Erikson's psychosocial development stages. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation. Findings revealed a very weak negative correlation ($r = -0.007$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting no statistically significant relationship between authoritarian parenting and child development in the studied context. These results highlight that child development is more strongly influenced by external factors such as extended family support, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural values. This study contributes to the global debate on parenting by emphasizing the contextual and cultural variability of authoritarian parenting effects. Practical implications suggest that interventions to enhance child development should adopt a holistic and ecosystem-based approach, involving parents, schools, and communities rather than focusing solely on parenting style.

Keywords: authoritarian parenting style, child development, families

INTRODUCTION

Parenting has long been recognized as a central factor in shaping children's developmental outcomes across cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Parenting styles, particularly those conceptualized by Baumrind, have provided a robust framework for understanding how parental control, responsiveness, and communication patterns influence child growth. Among these, the authoritarian parenting style, characterized by high control, strict rules, and low responsiveness, has received substantial scholarly attention. This parenting style is often contrasted with authoritative and permissive approaches, which emphasize warmth and negotiation (Pinquart, 2021).

From a developmental psychology perspective, Erikson's psychosocial theory situates children aged 3–7 within the initiative versus guilt stage, a critical phase in which they develop curiosity, autonomy, and the confidence to initiate activities. Overly restrictive parental practices may suppress children's initiative, leading to feelings of guilt, hesitation, or low self-esteem. Consequently, authoritarian parenting has often been associated with negative psychosocial outcomes such as limited self-expression, poor social adjustment, and reduced initiative (Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Siregar et al., 2021).

However, research findings regarding the effects of authoritarian parenting remain inconsistent across cultural contexts. In Western societies, authoritarian parenting is generally linked to maladaptive outcomes (Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Pinquart, 2021). In contrast, studies in collectivist cultures, including parts of Asia, have found that strict parenting may be perceived as a form of care and responsibility, thus diminishing its negative impact (Francis et al., 2021; Lansford et al., 2018). These cultural differences suggest that the consequences of authoritarian parenting may not be universal but instead mediated by sociocultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and family structures (Wulandari & Andaryuni, 2025).

Despite the growing body of literature, significant gaps remain. First, few studies have investigated the relationship between authoritarian parenting and early childhood development in the specific psychosocial stage of initiative versus guilt. Second, empirical evidence from low socioeconomic contexts is limited, even though such environments often constrain parental education and resources, which may in turn influence parenting practices (Zulkarnain et al., 2020). Third, research from Indonesia—a country where extended

family involvement and communal values play a strong role in child-rearing—remains underrepresented in the global discourse on parenting (Dhiu & Fono, 2022).

To address these gaps, the present study investigates the relationship between authoritarian parenting and child development among families in Tugu District, Semarang, Indonesia, a community characterized by relatively low parental education and economic vulnerability (Mustapa et al., 2018). By applying Baumrind's parenting typology and Erikson's psychosocial framework, this study aims to evaluate whether authoritarian parenting significantly influences developmental outcomes in children aged 3–7.

This study makes several contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the cross-cultural understanding of authoritarian parenting by situating findings within the Indonesian context, thereby extending debates on the universality versus contextuality of parenting effects. Practically, the study provides insights for policymakers, educators, and child welfare practitioners on how parenting interventions should be designed—emphasizing not only parental control but also the broader social ecosystem that shapes child development. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of examining parenting styles within their socioeconomic and cultural settings rather than assuming homogeneous effects across societies.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between authoritarian parenting and child development. A purposive sample of 60 parents with children aged 3–7 years in Tugu District, Semarang, was recruited. Inclusion criteria required parents to be directly involved in child-rearing and willing to provide informed consent.

Data were collected using a 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire developed from Baumrind's parenting typology and Erikson's psychosocial framework. The instrument was validated by experts and pilot-tested, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

The independent variable (X) was authoritarian parenting, and the dependent variable (Y) was child development (initiative vs. guilt stage). Data were analyzed using SPSS 25, with normality assessed by the Shapiro–Wilk test and correlation measured by Pearson's product–moment correlation. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis revealed that among the 60 participating parents, 15.0% ($n = 6$) demonstrated a high level of authoritarian parenting, 71.7% ($n = 43$) were in the moderate category, and 13.3% ($n = 8$) fell into the low category (Figure 1). This indicates that most parents did not adopt authoritarian parenting in extreme forms but rather in moderate expressions of control and demand.

Table 1. Distribution of Authoritarian Parenting Levels ($n=60$)

Parenting Level	n	Percent
High	6	15.0%
Moderate	43	71.7%
Low	8	13.3%

Prior to correlation testing, normality assumptions were checked using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Both the independent variable (authoritarian parenting, X) and the dependent variable (child development, Y) were normally distributed ($p = 0.448$ and $p = 0.106$, respectively), thus fulfilling the requirement for parametric analysis.

Table 2. Normality Tests (Shapiro–Wilk)

Variable	Statistic (p-value)	Interpretation
Authoritarian Parenting (X)	$p = 0.448$	Normal
Child Development (Y)	$p = 0.106$	Normal

The Pearson product–moment correlation analysis showed $r = -0.007$, $p = 0.559$, suggesting a very weak and negative relationship between authoritarian parenting and child development, which was not statistically significant.

Table 3. Correlation Summary

Correlation	r	p-value	Interpretation
Parenting (X) × Development (Y)	-0.007	0.559	Very weak, negative, non-significant

The finding that authoritarian parenting did not significantly predict child development aligns with prior evidence suggesting that the effects of authoritarian control on children's outcomes are often small and inconsistent across contexts. A meta-analysis confirmed that harsh or authoritarian parenting is associated with higher risks of internalizing and externalizing problems, yet the effect sizes remain relatively modest (Pinquart, 2021).

Cross-national studies have further demonstrated that the consequences of authoritarian parenting vary depending on cultural norms and socioeconomic conditions. For instance, Lansford et al. (2018) found that authoritarian parenting predicted externalizing behaviors from ages 7 to 14 across nine countries, but variance was explained more by family-level characteristics than by culture itself. Similarly, Pinquart & Kauser (2018) concluded from a meta-analysis that while authoritarian parenting is generally linked to negative outcomes, the strength of this association differs by cultural values, particularly in collectivist societies where strict control may be perceived as care and responsibility.

In the context of early childhood, research consistently shows that authoritarian parenting is associated with lower social-emotional readiness and more behavioral difficulties among preschoolers (Ren & Pope Edwards, 2015; Sarac, 2024). However, recent findings indicate that such effects are moderated by socioeconomic status, peer environments, and cultural expectations (Xia, 2023; Yim, 2022). In China, for example, authoritarian practices predicted poorer school readiness outcomes primarily in low-SES families (Xia & Chen, 2023). In Asian cultures, where parental authority is normative, children may not interpret control as harsh, thereby buffering its negative impact (Yong et al., 2023).

The non-significant correlation in this study can therefore be explained by several factors. First, most parents reported moderate authoritarian practices, leading to restricted variability and reducing the likelihood of detecting significant effects. Second, the sample size ($n = 60$) provided sufficient power for medium effects but may not have been sensitive enough to detect small effects. Third, unmeasured moderators such as extended family support, community involvement, and cultural norms may have counteracted or obscured the negative impacts of authoritarian parenting in this Indonesian setting. Indeed, evidence suggests that collectivist communities, with strong intergenerational involvement, may mitigate the negative consequences of strict parenting (Wulandari & Andaryuni, 2025).

From a practical perspective, these findings emphasize that interventions should not narrowly focus on modifying parental control but rather consider the broader ecosystem of child development, including schools, communities, and cultural practices. Promoting authoritative parenting, which balances control with warmth and responsiveness, has been consistently linked to better socio-emotional and academic outcomes worldwide (McWhirter et al., 2023). Therefore, policies should aim to enhance parental education while also leveraging existing cultural strengths such as extended family and community networks.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between authoritarian parenting and child development among children aged 3–7 years in Semarang, Indonesia. The findings revealed a very weak and non-significant correlation ($r = -0.007$, $p = 0.559$), indicating that authoritarian parenting alone did not substantially predict developmental outcomes at the initiative versus guilt stage.

These results suggest that child development is shaped by broader ecological factors beyond parenting style, including extended family support, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural norms that may buffer the potential negative effects of authoritarian practices. The findings reinforce existing evidence that the influence of authoritarian parenting is not universal but contextual, varying across cultural and socioeconomic settings.

From a practical standpoint, child development interventions should adopt a holistic approach that integrates parental education with school and community support. Encouraging authoritative practices—characterized by warmth and firm guidance—while recognizing cultural parenting norms may be more effective in promoting healthy child development.

Future research should employ larger and longitudinal samples and consider potential moderating variables such as parental warmth, peer influence, and community resources. Such studies would enrich the global understanding of parenting styles by clarifying when, how, and under what conditions authoritarian parenting exerts developmental consequences.

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