

Bullied Adolescents and Parenting Styles: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Research

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Abstract

This article examines how parenting styles influence adolescents' involvement in bullying behavior. Classic theoretical frameworks—authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful—are discussed in relation to adolescent social development and emotional regulation. Based on existing empirical studies, this review identifies parental warmth, consistency, and supervision as protective factors against bullying. The findings emphasize the need for family-based interventions and the inclusion of parenting strategies in anti-bullying policies.

Introduction

Bullying is one of the most acute and widespread psychosocial issues in contemporary schools, requiring not only individual but systemic intervention. In recent years, both academic research and educational policy have shown increased interest in this topic (Olweus, 1993; Espelage and Swearer, 2004; Smith, 2019). Bullying is not merely the outcome of interpersonal conflict—it is characterized by repeated aggression involving a power imbalance, which affects the psychological and social functioning of both the victim and the aggressor (Olweus, 1994; Salmivalli, 1999). It significantly influences students' academic motivation, attitudes toward school, and emotional well-being, and often leads to social isolation, anxiety, depression, and even self-harm or suicidal ideation (Hawker and Boulton, 2000).

Bullying should not be perceived as stemming solely from a child's or adolescent's personality traits. Rather, it emerges and is reinforced within a social context shaped by individual, relational, and systemic influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The family setting plays a particularly significant role, as it is the foundational environment for a child's social development. Parenting style—the emotional and behavioral framework through which parents interact with their children—profoundly shapes children's social strategies, self-esteem, emotional regulation, and peer relationships (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Gratz and Roemer, 2004, Smith 2019, Asatiani 2021).

Baumrind's influential model (1971) identifies four main styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. The authoritative style—marked by high emotional warmth and clear expectations—promotes self-regulation, responsibility, and social adaptability. In contrast, authoritarian parenting emphasizes strict control with low emotional closeness, often resulting in anxiety, obedience, or aggression. Permissive and neglectful styles are typically associated with behavioral problems, emotional dysregulation, and poor social adjustment (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Many researchers emphasize that

adolescents become victims of bullying when they lack social adaptation skills.

Recent studies suggest that maladaptive parenting styles—particularly authoritarian and neglectful—significantly increase the risk of both perpetrating and becoming victims of bullying (Espelage and Holt, 2013; Schwartz et al., 1993; Smith, 2019). Children raised in these environments tend to have poor emotional regulation and high impulsivity, making them vulnerable as both aggressors and victims (Gratz and Roemer, 2004).

Theoretical background: Parenting Styles

Based on her research, Diana Baumrind (1966) distinguished three parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Later, Maccoby and Martin (1983) added a fourth: neglectful parenting.

- **Authoritative parenting** maintains a balance between warmth, support, and high expectations. Parents encourage autonomy, listen to their children, avoid physical punishment, and promote responsibility. Also known as democratic parenting, this style fosters emotional regulation, self-confidence, motivation, and strong social skills.
- **Authoritarian parenting** is characterized by strict control, high demands, and limited warmth. Parents often use harsh verbal or physical discipline. Children raised under this style may become anxious, dependent, indecisive, or, conversely, overly aggressive. This style is associated with low self-esteem and higher risk of depression.
- **Permissive parenting** involves excessive warmth with few rules or structure. Parents often act more like friends than authority figures. Children raised permissively may struggle with self-control and exhibit impulsive or oppositional behavior. While some may develop high self-esteem, others face behavioral difficulties and poor social boundaries.

- **Neglectful parenting** is defined by emotional unavailability, minimal involvement, and lack of guidance. These children often lack affection and attention and are at increased risk of academic problems, behavioral disorders, and mental health issues.

Darling and Steinberg's (1993) model defines parenting style as the emotional climate in which specific parenting behaviors occur. Their integrated approach highlights not only what parents do but how they do it. Authoritative parents provide warmth and structure, authoritarian ones impose rigid control, permissive parents avoid boundaries, and neglectful parents provide neither support nor structure. These styles have direct implications for children's social competence, emotional health, and vulnerability to bullying.

Definition of bullying and empirical Studies

Norwegian psychologist Dan Olweus was a pioneer in defining and researching bullying. He identified bullying as **intentional, repeated aggression** involving a **power imbalance**, distinguishing it from mere conflict (Olweus, 1993, 1994).

Olweus categorized bullying into:

- **Direct bullying** – e.g., hitting, verbal abuse
- **Indirect bullying** – e.g., exclusion, rumor-spreading

Olweus emphasized that bullying stems from both personal traits and contextual influences, such as family, school, and peer groups.

Dorothy Espelage's research shows that home experiences—especially the emotional climate and communication patterns—play a crucial role in determining whether adolescents become victims or aggressors (Espelage and Swearer, 2004; Espelage and Holt, 2013).

Contrary to stereotypes, many bullying victims are not inherently weak but may lack strong peer connections or conflict-resolution skills (Salmivalli, 1999; Smith, 2019; Asatiani, 2021).

Recent large-scale research supports these conclusions:

- **Grama et al. (2024)** conducted a meta-analysis of 158 studies, confirming that **authoritative parenting** significantly reduces involvement in bullying, while **authoritarian or neglectful** styles increase risk.
- **Gardner et al. (2020)** found that **parent-involved programs** are moderately effective ($d = .64$) in preventing bullying, especially when they promote **emotional communication** and **family-school collaboration**.
- **He et al. (2023)** in China demonstrated that **authoritative parenting** strengthens both **intrapersonal** and **interpersonal intelligence**, buffering against bullying behavior.
- **Evgin et al. (2021)** found that **positive parenting**, including supervision and warmth, reduces both traditional and cyberbullying; inconsistent discipline increases risk.

Conclusion

Parenting style significantly influences adolescents' roles in bullying—whether as victims, perpetrators, or bystanders. Theoretical and empirical studies confirm that **warmth, consistency, and emotional support** are protective, while **rigidity, neglect, and emotional unavailability** heighten vulnerability.

Authoritative parenting fosters emotional resilience, social competence, and independence—all factors that reduce the likelihood of bullying involvement. Conversely, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful styles are associated with poor emotion regulation, maladaptive social behaviors, and increased victimization.

Parenting style must be understood not only as an individual developmental factor but also as a **systemic variable**—one that should inform **educational policies, school-based prevention programs, and family-centered interventions**. Combating bullying requires addressing both the **school environment** and the **family system** together.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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