

Parenting Styles and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Addressing Research Gaps in Developmental Psychology Within the USA

Mercy Vivian Sulaiman

Department of Psychology, University of New Hampshire, 105 Main St., Durham, NH 03824, USA

mercy.sulaiman@unh.edu

ABSTRACT

This study explores the intersection of parenting styles and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) within the context of developmental psychology in the United States. ADHD, a complex neurodevelopmental disorder, significantly impacts children and their families, with parenting styles playing a critical role in shaping symptoms, behaviors, and long-term outcomes. Despite substantial research on ADHD, gaps remain in understanding the nuanced interactions between parenting practices and child development, particularly across diverse social and economic contexts. This paper reviews existing literature, identifies research deficiencies, and proposes a multidisciplinary framework to inform culturally relevant and evidence-based interventions. By emphasizing the bidirectional influence between children's behaviors and parenting styles, the study advocates for targeted strategies to enhance family functioning and improve outcomes for children with ADHD. Future directions for research and practical implications are discussed to address these gaps and advance developmental psychology's contributions to ADHD management.

KEYWORDS: Psychology, ADHD, Parenting styles, Neurodevelopmental Disorder, Families, Bidirectional Influences, ADHD outcomes, and Child Behavior

DOI: 10.7176/JHMN/119-01

Publication date: January 30th 2025

INTRODUCTION

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a common neurodevelopmental disorder that affects approximately 9.8% of children in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022). Characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, ADHD has significant implications for children's social, academic, and emotional development, as well as their families (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022). Beyond its clinical complexity, ADHD's multifactorial etiology—rooted in both genetic and environmental influences—makes it particularly challenging to address. Among these influences, parenting styles stand out as critical environmental factors that shape the expression and trajectory of ADHD symptoms (Johnston & Mash, 2001).

Parenting styles, traditionally categorized into authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful, reflect distinct combinations of warmth and control that uniquely impact child development (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritative parenting, which balances high warmth with structured discipline, has consistently been linked to positive outcomes, including improved self-regulation and adaptive coping strategies in children with ADHD (Hinshaw et al., 2014). Conversely, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles often exacerbate ADHD-related challenges, such as aggression, emotional dysregulation, and academic struggles (Muñoz-Silva et al., 2017). Importantly, the relationship between parenting styles and ADHD is bidirectional. Children with ADHD often exhibit impulsivity, defiance, and emotional dysregulation, which can strain parental coping mechanisms and influence parenting behaviors. This feedback loop may create a cycle of ineffective parenting strategies and worsening symptoms, underscoring the need for interventions that address both child behaviors and parental responses (Hutchison et al., 2016).

Cultural and socioeconomic contexts further complicate the interplay between parenting styles and ADHD. While authoritative parenting is a robust predictor of positive outcomes in Western cultures, its effectiveness varies in collectivist societies, where authoritarian practices may align with cultural norms (Setyanisa et al., 2022). Additionally, socioeconomic stressors such as financial hardship and limited access to resources can hinder the adoption of effective parenting strategies, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive and economically feasible interventions.

Despite substantial research on ADHD and parenting, significant gaps remain. Much of the existing literature relies on cross-sectional designs, limiting the understanding of how parenting styles influence ADHD trajectories over time. Moreover, the predominance of Western samples restricts the generalizability of findings to non-Western populations. Research has also largely overlooked the broader family system, including sibling relationships, co-parenting dynamics, and extended family influences, which play critical roles in shaping outcomes for children with ADHD.

This review seeks to address these gaps by synthesizing current knowledge on the bidirectional relationship between parenting styles and ADHD through a developmental psychological lens. By emphasizing the interplay between child behavior and parenting practices, the study aims to inform evidence-based, culturally relevant strategies for intervention. Such a comprehensive approach not only supports families but also fosters better academic, social, and emotional outcomes for children with ADHD in diverse American contexts.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing research on the influence of parenting styles on Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The SLR adheres to established guidelines to ensure transparency, replicability, and rigor throughout the research process (Moher et al., 2009). To identify relevant studies, Boolean search techniques were applied across multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search strategy incorporated specific Boolean operators and keywords to capture peer-reviewed articles addressing the interplay between parenting styles and ADHD in children. The search terms included combinations such as "ADHD" OR "Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder," "Parenting styles" OR "Parent-child interaction," and "Behavioral outcomes" OR "Emotional regulation." Additional filters ensured the inclusion of peer-reviewed studies published in English after the year 2000.

To maintain relevance and quality, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. The inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2024, focusing on children and adolescents diagnosed with ADHD, examining the relationship between parenting styles and ADHD-related outcomes, and employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods designs. Studies conducted in diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts were also included. Exclusion criteria ruled out studies focusing on non-human subjects, articles addressing ADHD in adults without explicit reference to parenting styles, grey literature, and studies lacking methodological rigor or sufficient data analysis.

The screening process followed three stages: identification, screening, and eligibility assessment. Initially, the database search yielded 256 articles, which were reduced to 212 after removing duplicates. Titles and abstracts were screened, narrowing the pool to 38 articles, followed by a full-text review that identified 14 studies meeting all inclusion criteria. The process adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework for transparency (Page et al., 2021). Data extraction and synthesis involved a standardized form to collect details on authorship, publication year, sample characteristics, parenting style classifications, and ADHD-related outcomes. Thematic synthesis was employed to identify patterns, trends, and gaps across the included studies. The quality of the selected studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), ensuring that only studies scoring at least 80% on methodological rigor were included (Hong et al., 2018).

The review adhered to ethical standards, ensuring accurate representation of findings and proper attribution to sources. As no primary data collection was conducted, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was unnecessary. However, the study acknowledges potential limitations, including the restriction to English-language publications, which may exclude relevant non-English studies, and a focus on peer-reviewed articles, potentially omitting insights from grey literature. By following this systematic methodology, the study provides a comprehensive synthesis of current knowledge on the relationship between parenting styles and ADHD, offering actionable insights for intervention and policy development.

DATA ANALYSIS

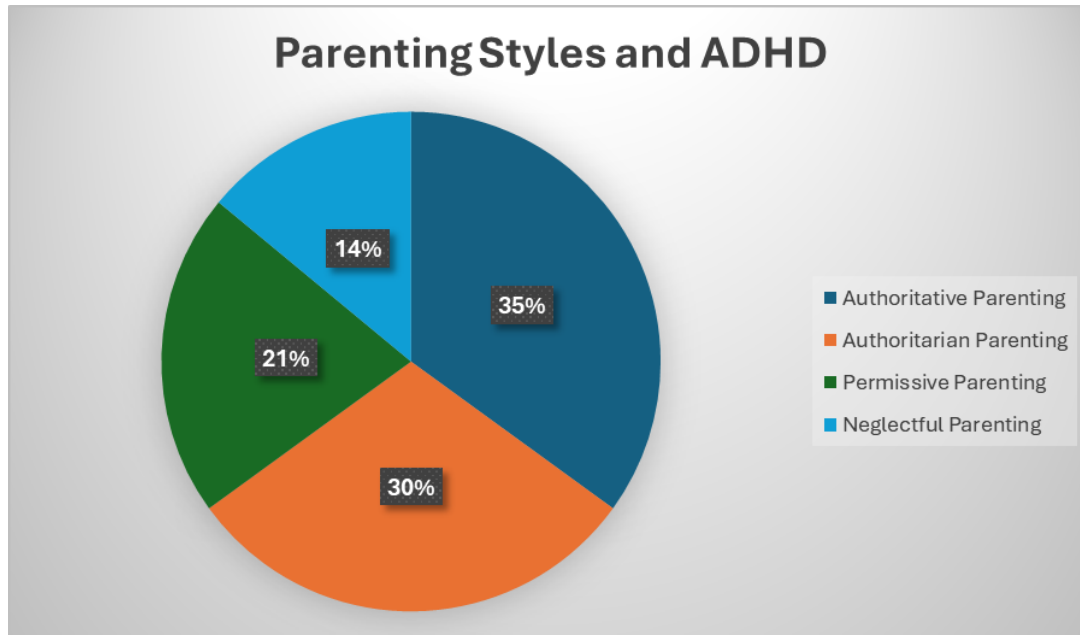


Figure 1: Parenting Styles and ADHD

Figure 1 presents data derived from 14 articles examining the influence of parenting styles on ADHD in children. These studies collectively highlight the critical role that parenting styles—evaluated along the dimensions of warmth and control—play in shaping the developmental outcomes of children with ADHD. The findings emphasize the need for tailored interventions that address the unique needs of ADHD children and their families. According to Figure 1, **35% of the articles focus on the authoritative parenting style**, underscoring its significant positive impact on ADHD outcomes. **Authoritarian parenting is addressed in 30% of the articles** (4 articles), while **21% discuss permissive parenting** (3 articles), and **14% examine neglectful parenting** (1 article). These percentages illustrate the diverse research emphasis across parenting styles, reflecting their varying degrees of influence on children with ADHD.

Authoritative Parenting- Authoritative parenting, characterized by a harmonious blend of high warmth and moderate control, emerges as the most beneficial style for children with ADHD (Muñoz-Silva et al., 2017). This approach combines consistent structure and clear expectations with emotional support and autonomy (Muñoz-Silva et al., 2017). Research demonstrates that authoritative parenting enhances emotional regulation, reduces impulsivity, and improves academic outcomes in children with ADHD (Stevens et al., 2019). The supportive and predictable environment created by authoritative parents fosters self-discipline and strengthens executive functioning and social skills (Muñoz-Silva et al., 2017). However, implementing authoritative parenting can be challenging in socio-economic or cultural contexts that favor harsher or more indulgent practices. Future research is necessary to adapt authoritative strategies to diverse family settings effectively.

Authoritarian Parenting—Authoritarian parenting, defined by high control and low warmth, is associated with negative outcomes for children with ADHD (Molina & Musich, 2015). This rigid and punitive approach often exacerbates emotional dysregulation, oppositional behaviors, and low self-esteem (Molina & Musich, 2015). While it may temporarily reduce behavioral infractions, it frequently leads to increased anxiety and depressive symptoms over time. In collectivist cultures, authoritarian parenting aligns with cultural norms, which can mitigate its adverse effects or alter how it is perceived (Setyanisa et al., 2022). Effective interventions should respect cultural values while addressing the negative aspects of authoritarian practices to create sustainable improvements in parenting approaches.

Permissive Parenting—Permissive parenting, marked by high warmth but low control, often results in environments lacking structure and discipline (Muñoz-Silva et al., 2017; Molina & Musich, 2015). For children

with ADHD, this lack of boundaries can intensify impulsivity, impair self-regulation, and lead to externalizing behaviors such as aggression and defiance (Muñoz-Silva et al., 2017; Molina & Musich, 2015).

The studies suggest that interventions for permissive parents should aim to establish consistent behavioral boundaries while maintaining emotional warmth. This approach can help children with ADHD feel secure and develop healthier behavioral patterns.

Neglectful Parenting— Neglectful parenting, characterized by low warmth and low control, consistently demonstrates the most detrimental impact on children with ADHD (Alizadeh et al., 2007). This disengaged style deprives children of essential emotional support and behavioral scaffolding, leading to academic underachievement, social withdrawal, and increased risks of anxiety, depression, and peer rejection (Alizadeh et al., 2007). Addressing caregiver disengagement is crucial. Interventions should focus on equipping caregivers with tools and strategies to create nurturing and structured environments that meet the needs of children with ADHD (Stevens et al., 2019).

The collective findings from these 14 articles highlight the in-depth impact of parenting styles on ADHD children. While authoritative parenting demonstrates the most promise, addressing the challenges associated with authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful styles is essential. Developing effective interventions that accommodate diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts is critical to improving outcomes for ADHD children and their families.

Adapting Parenting Styles to Complement ADHD Approaches

Understanding the varying effects of parental styles on individuals with ADHD highlights the need for personalized strategies to foster positive outcomes. Behavioral parent training (BPT) has been developed as one of the more efficacious interventions. These classes sought to teach parents how to implement some of the best practices that a reliance on authoritative practices would entail; this included aspects such as discipline, communication and reinforcement. Research reveals that BPT greatly improves behavioral outcomes among children by improving parental skills and reducing coercive interactions between parents and child (Leijten et al., 2018).

Psychoeducation is also an important aspect, educating parents about the nature of their child with ADHD and their specific requirements. Psychoeducation demystifies the condition, promotes empathy, provides parents with evidence-based tools, as well as tips, to support their child's optimal development. These parenting practices are highly influenced by the culture of a society and thus, extending cultural lenses in these interventions is necessary. Culturally relevant tailoring can enhance the relevance and impact of programs across heterogeneous populations.

School-based interventions involving parents can facilitate a comprehensive approach in addressing this condition. Programs like teacher-parent partnerships help ensure positive behaviors are reinforced both in the home and in school settings. Digital tools, such as telehealth platforms and mobile applications, can facilitate the delivery of parenting interventions and can enhance accessibility in resource-poor settings.

Intervening on Parental Stress and Self-Efficacy

Parental stress mediates parenting style and ADHD outcomes significantly. Elevated stress can also reduce parents' capacity to use effective strategies, resulting in misguided or overly punitive practices. The evidence base for specific interventions is still developing, but models that include stress-management techniques, such as mindfulness-based parenting and cognitive-behavioral programs have been shown to improve the resilience of parents and the functioning of families (van der Oord et al., 2012). Through enhancing parental self-efficacy, these programs help empower caregivers to effectively navigate the challenges of managing ADHD with confidence and consistency.

Cultural Adaptations

Given that parenting practices are strongly shaped by cultural expectations and values, this highlights the need for adapting interventions to diverse family contexts. Programs tailored to collectivist cultures may prioritize community-based support and involve extended family participation, whereas programs designed for individualistic cultures may promote autonomy and self-reliance. Partnering with cultural leaders and engagement with stakeholders in the creation of these programs will increase acceptance and effectiveness in targeted populations.

Bidirectional influences in parenting and ADHD

Parenting styles and ADHD behaviors have a naturally bidirectional relationship, with dynamic feedback loops influencing each other. Children with ADHD often do far more than just misbehave — they show persistent, impulsive and/or emotional behavior that can drive even the most patient of parents to the ceiling. This may elicit punishing or overly tolerant parenting responses, which reinforce cycles of conflict and exacerbate symptom severity (Hutchison et al., 2016).

This maladaptive cycle cannot be broken without addressing both child behaviors and parental responses because they interact with each other. Indeed, research indicates that such interventions targeted specifically towards parental stress management are the most effective at improving outcomes. Predictably high levels of parental stress lead to inconsistency or harshness in parenting, which aggravate the ADHD symptoms. Mindfulness-based parenting programs have been effective at improving positive parent-child interactions and reducing overall symptom severity in parents and children (van der Oord et al. 2012).

Furthermore, the need to foster parental self-efficacy is paramount. By being able to take stock of their own confidence in managing their child's ADHD, parents will realize their own strengths and be able to put those into the full action of more effective strategies on a regular basis. Support networks and peer groups offer avenues for sharing experiences, reducing isolation, and fostering resilience among parents. It can help parents identify and glorify small victories increase their sense of competence and motivation, interrupting the cycle of negative interactions.

Gaps in Current Research

Despite significant progress in understanding the relationship between parenting styles and ADHD, several critical gaps remain in the existing body of research. Most studies have relied on cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to explore how parenting styles influence the long-term development and progression of ADHD over time. Additionally, the majority of research has been conducted within Western contexts, creating a substantial gap in our understanding of how parenting beliefs and practices may vary in non-Western or indigenous cultures, and how these cultural differences might affect ADHD.

There is also a lack of studies evaluating the long-term efficacy of tailored parenting interventions, particularly in low-resource environments where access to support and resources is limited. Furthermore, many existing studies overlook the bidirectional relationship between a child's behavior and the parenting response, highlighting the need for intervention models that consider this dynamic interaction. Addressing these gaps is crucial for refining interventions and ensuring they are effective across diverse contexts and developmental stages.

Suggested Solutions and Future Perspectives

To fill these gaps, this systematic review article suggests several viable strategies:

Pioneering Approaches: For instance, integrating behavioral therapy, parent training, and educational support to holistically address ADHD Collaboration with psychologists, educators, and medical professionals helps us bring a well-rounded plan for child and family support. Consider Cultural Contexts: Design programs that integrate local beliefs and practices alongside evidence-based approaches. Working together with community stakeholders can ensure the relevance and acceptability of such programs. Integration of Technology: Use digital platforms to implement parent training programs particularly in low-resource settings. Telehealth and mobile apps can be affordable, scalable solutions for families who need support.

Longitudinal Research: Focus on research that follows individuals over time to assess the long-term effects of different parenting styles on ADHD, offering insights into the long-term trajectories of these relationships and their influence on long-term outcomes. Policy Advocacy: Work to promote policies that not only expand access to low-cost mental health treatment, parenting classes, and educational resources but make Ensure support for families is equitable regardless of socio-economic background.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Parenting styles play a crucial role in the development and well-being of children, especially those with ADHD. Research consistently highlights authoritative parenting—characterized by a balance of structure, warmth, and support—as the most effective approach. This style helps children regulate their emotions and behavior. However, the strategies used to manage ADHD are influenced by cultural norms, socio-economic

conditions, and the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between parents and children. While authoritative parenting is proven to be effective, its success depends on how parents adapt it to their unique situations. For example, integrating the controlled aspects of authoritarian parenting with the nurturing features of authoritative parenting may enhance collectivist parenting styles. Additionally, interventions for low-resource families must address structural barriers to accessing support, such as psychoeducation and behavioral training programs.

The research emphasizes the need for a multidisciplinary approach to managing ADHD, involving parents, educators, healthcare providers, and policymakers. Behavioral Parent Training (BPT) remains an effective intervention, especially when tailored to families and supplemented with psychoeducation. Technology, such as telehealth platforms and mobile apps, can also increase access to interventions, particularly in underprivileged communities. The bidirectional nature of parenting and ADHD suggests that treatment approaches should consider both the child's symptoms and the parent's stress and self-efficacy. Reducing parental rigidity and maladaptive behaviors can help break cycles of negative interactions, fostering a more positive family environment through mindfulness-based parenting and stress reduction. These strategies should be integrated into broader intervention frameworks to provide comprehensive family support.

Long-term studies are needed to understand how parenting styles affect ADHD outcomes over different developmental stages. There is also a pressing need for culturally sensitive research that explores non-Western parenting practices and their influence on ADHD. Such studies can form the basis for globally applicable frameworks that respect local authority while ensuring evidence-based practices remain relevant. Policy initiatives should support the widespread adoption of family-focused ADHD interventions. Subsidizing parenting programs, enhancing school-based support, and increasing mental health resources can significantly improve the lives of children and their families. Helping ADHD families is a systemic change that enables them to succeed.

Parental involvement is not a secondary factor in ADHD management; it is a primary driver of long-term child outcomes. Addressing research gaps with culturally sensitive, multidisciplinary, and innovative approaches will improve the quality of life for children with ADHD and their families. This underscores the importance of a collaborative approach to create spaces that allow children with ADHD to thrive, even through sustained effort over time. Based on the study's findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Promote Parenting Education Programs:** Develop and implement evidence-based programs that provide parents with strategies to manage ADHD symptoms, promote positive parenting styles, and strengthen parent-child relationships, especially in underserved communities with limited access to mental health resources.
- **Integrate Multidisciplinary Support Services:** Foster collaboration between schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations to establish comprehensive support systems for families of children with ADHD. Policies should prioritize accessible mental health services, parent training, and educational interventions tailored to the specific needs of each family.
- **Culturally Relevant Interventions:** Design and fund interventions that are culturally responsive and reflect the diverse social and economic contexts across the U.S. Given that parenting styles and ADHD outcomes vary by culture, policies should ensure that interventions are respectful of and incorporate cultural values and practices.
- **Increase Research Funding and Data Collection:** Allocate funding for longitudinal studies to better understand the bidirectional impact of parenting styles on ADHD development and management. Policymakers should support research focusing on underrepresented populations to address existing gaps and enhance the generalizability of findings in developmental psychology.

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