

Parental Influence on Moral Development: Role of Temperament and Self-Regulation

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Abstract: Parental influence plays a vital role in the formation of children's moral development. This paper aims to comprehensively review mainly focused on past decade empirical research and theoretical perspectives, and explore the impact of different parenting styles, child traits and cultural backgrounds on moral outcomes. The systematic review includes qualitative and quantitative studies to provide a balanced perspective on the role of parents in moral development. The findings consistently emphasize that authoritative parenting, warmth with attributes, and control can promote positive moral outcomes. However, the temperament and cultural background of the children significantly mitigated these effects. However, the impact of these parenting styles is not uniform across all children. These effects are considerably moderated by cultural background and child temperament, including emotional reactivity and self-regulation levels. For example, children raised in collectivist vs individualist cultures or those with more difficult temperaments could react differently to the same parenting techniques. This paper identifies the major gaps in current research, including the need for longitudinal and cross-cultural studies research, and proposes future research directions, particularly regarding the impact of modern technology on ethical development.

Keywords: Parenting styles, Self-regulation, Cross-cultural research, Moral development, Temperament.

1. Introduction

Moral development has long been a central topic in developmental psychology, with countless psychologists delving deeply into children's brains, just to solve the long-standing mystery of how one builds a balance of good and evil within oneself, and how one acquires moral reasoning, values, and behavior. Classical theorists such as Jean Piaget and Kolberg focused on cognitive processes, laying the foundation for understanding the stages of moral reasoning, but morality is not a steadily increasing ladder or staged cognitive process [1, 2]. Morality manifests differently across various contexts, cultures, and social roles, reflecting the diverse ways in which ethical principles are interpreted and applied. Over the past two decades, psychologists have emphasized the importance of emotional and social factors, particularly the role of parents in shaping moral outcomes [3, 4, 5]. Parents become primary socialized factors of children's moral behavior, reasoning, and values. Children's moral development varies across cultures due to differing parenting practices, leading to diverse and often unpredictable moral frameworks. The review aims to synthesize the existing

literature on the role of parents in shaping children's moral development, focusing on three areas: the impact of parenting styles on moral development, the interaction between parental and child temperaments and the moderating effect of cultural and religious backgrounds. It is of great theoretical and practical significance to understand the role of parents in moral development. The insights gained from this review can inform parental intervention, educational programmers and policy development aimed at fostering the moral responsibility of children. In addition, identifying gaps in the existing literature will guide future research, particularly in cross-cultural studies and longitudinal fields.

2. Method

By analyzing the knowledge provided by this literature, a comprehensive overview of how parental behaviors and attitudes affect children's ethical outcomes is provided and future research directions are proposed. Through an analysis of the literature between 1962 and 2023, this paper provides a comprehensive overview of how parenting behaviors and attitudes influence children's moral development and suggests directions for future research. This paper selected 19 peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical studies, with selection criteria focused on exploring the relationship between moral development, parenting styles, and related factors (e.g., children's emotions and self-regulation). The inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative studies allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and insights from multiple approaches.

3. Parental Influence on Moral Development

Authoritative parenting, often characterized by a high degree of warmth and control, has been widely shown to be associated with positive moral outcomes in children. For instance, a study conducted in the US and Canada examined the effects of different parenting philosophies on the competence and adjustment of teenagers. These philosophies included authoritarian, indulgent, neglectful, and authoritative parenting.

The study employed quantitative methods, collecting data through self-reported questionnaires from adolescents in the United States and Canada. The results show that authoritative parents were found to produce more empathetic and responsible children [6]. By setting clear boundaries and rules, and demonstrating care and support for their children, these parents help develop moral reasoning skills in following the rules. This two-pronged approach enables children not only to adhere to external standards, but also to internalize these moral principles and thus form lasting moral values [7].

Furthermore, by communicating openly with their kids, authoritative parents frequently encourage moral growth. For instance, a research on how family interactions affect moral development discovered that parent-child dialogue can encourage youngsters to think critically about difficult moral dilemmas [8]. Children are urged to think critically, assess the effects of various options, and get a greater comprehension of moral concepts through these conversations. Because these discussions are participatory, parents may help their kids think critically about moral quandaries while also developing their social-cognitive and communication skills. Such dialogue not only helps in reinforcing moral values but also promotes empathy and moral reasoning in children, enabling them to apply these principles in real-life situations. This process significantly enhances their moral reasoning abilities. In addition, authoritative parents often use role models to reinforce prosocial behavior [9]. When children see how their parents treat others with respect and help those in need in their daily lives, they are more likely to imitate these prosocial behaviors.

However, tolerant and autocratic parenting have the opposite effect. Because of the lack of clear boundaries and rules, tolerant parents often lead to insufficient moral reasoning, making it difficult

to understand and comply with social norms. Research has shown that permissive parenting leads children to make self-centered decisions in the face of moral dilemmas rather than considering the interests of others [10]. A cross-cultural study on permissive parenting shows that it is also flawed across cultures, in both the west and the east, tolerant parents are less likely to develop high levels of moral reasoning [11]. Through a meta-analysis, the study examined the association between academic accomplishment, behavioral issues, and parenting styles by methodically reviewing and synthesizing data from several studies conducted in diverse cultural contexts. The findings consistently showed that permissive parenting, which frequently fails to set clear limits or instill a sense of responsibility in children, is linked to poorer moral reasoning and behavioral regulation.

In contrast, the autocratic mode of education emphasizes discipline and obedience, but neglects the process of children's internalization of moral values. Children with authoritarian parenting performed well in obeying their parents' external rules, but when those rules were no longer strictly monitored, children's moral behavior was often unstable [6]. Authoritarian parents regulate their children's behavior through fear and punishment. However, this approach does not help children understand the moral principles behind their behavior, thus limiting their moral growth [12].

4. Social Context

Religious beliefs play an important role in moral socialization, and when parents incorporate religious teachings into their educational practices, they are able to instill in their children a strong sense of morality based on spiritual or moral principles [3]. GRUSEC noted that religious beliefs not only influence parents' values but also influence children's moral behaviour and perceptions by shaping the socialized environment of the family [3]. For example, pious parents often emphasize in their daily lives the core virtues of honesty, compassion and respect that underlie a child's moral development. This kind of moral value strengthened by religion can help children make more ethical choices in the face of moral dilemmas. However, the extent of this influence depends to a large extent on the cultural background and the level of parental involvement in religious activities [13]. The depth and frequency of religious involvement can influence how parents convey moral teachings and how important they are to children's moral understanding. For instance, in certain cultures, engaging in religious activities can help family members come to a stronger moral consensus, which makes it simpler for kids to embrace and assimilate these moral ideas.

Culture also plays a key role in regulating the influence of parenting on moral development. A cross-cultural study showed that authoritative parenting tends to produce moral outcomes in collectivism cultures that are quite different from those of individualistic cultures [14]. In collectivism culture, moral development places greater emphasis on group harmony and respect for authority, in contrast to the emphasis placed on autonomy and personal integrity in individualistic cultures. These cultural variations have an impact on children's moral perceptions and behavioral decisions in addition to parental parenting styles. As a result, when evaluating moral results, parental upbringing must be examined in light of culturally unique norms and expectations rather than being generalized to all cultural contexts.

5. Self-Regulation and Temperament

Temperament is crucial to children's moral development. Resilient children tend to respond more positively to authoritative parenting, which combines warmth and structured discipline to promote better moral reasoning and pro-social behavior. On the contrary, the more intense, difficult to control children may resist parental discipline, resulting in weak moral development. Studies have shown that individual differences in emotional responses and self-regulation play a crucial role in the

formation of ethical behaviors, and therefore it is essential to consider childlike temperament when developing parenting strategies [15,16].

There is a complex interaction between parental rearing patterns and children's temperament. Authoritative parents usually adjust their educational strategies according to their children's temperament, adapt to their children's reactions, and provide them with different degrees of control and care. This adaptive approach leads to better ethical outcomes, as parents tailor their education to their children's needs and make it more individualized. However, the study of how this interaction develops in different cultural contexts needs to be further explored.

Self-regulation, the ability to control emotions and behavior, is a key predictor of moral behavior. Those with greater self-regulation were more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior and adhere to ethical norms. Parents play a crucial role in fostering children's self-regulation, especially through consistent discipline and emotional support [15]. Parents can promote self-regulation by demonstrating appropriate behavior, setting clear boundaries, and providing opportunities for children to practice self-control [17]. Children's development of emotional resilience and moral behavior is especially aided by the warmth and participation of their parents [16].

6. Discussion

Many studies of parenting and moral development focus on Western cultural contexts, which may limit the applicability of these findings to other cultural contexts. Cultural background is crucial to parenting style and moral development. Future research should focus on cross-cultural comparison, to better understand how cultural values influence parenting practices and their impact on children's moral development. Moreover, most of the available studies use cross-sectional designs that limit our understanding of the long-term effects of parenting styles on moral development. To more accurately assess the lasting effects of different parenting styles on moral behavior and self-regulation, future studies should employ more longitudinal study designs to track changes in children's moral behavior over time [14]. Numerous recent research investigate the long-term impacts of parenting practices on moral development through longitudinal designs. A study in Spain including children over three years revealed that parental warmth and prosocial moral reasoning were important predictors of prosocial actions in teenagers [18]. This research exhibited bidirectional effects, suggesting that early prosocial activities may also affect subsequent parenting methods. The rapid development of modern technology, especially digital media, has brought new challenges to moral development. With the increasing complexity of the network environment, parents are facing new parenting problems, and the traditional education methods may not be enough to deal with these emerging moral development problems. Digital media can have a profound impact on children's values and behaviors, and therefore new research is needed to explore how parenting strategies can be adapted in the context of modern technology to promote ethical development [19].

7. Conclusion

The significance of comprehending parenting styles in relation to children's moral development cannot be underestimated. Various parenting styles significantly influence children's moral thinking and prosocial behavior; notably, authoritative parenting fosters a more robust moral compass in children. However, children's temperament and self-regulation also play a crucial role in this process. Resilient children tend to show more positive moral outcomes when raised with authority, while those with more "Difficult" temperaments may resist parental control, leading to delayed moral development. Similarly, the development of self-regulation is considered to be an important predictor of moral behavior, and the emotional support and disciplinary guidance provided by parents in this process is crucial. However, cross-cultural contexts and the impact of the digital age pose new

challenges for parents, and traditional parenting strategies may not be able to fully address the complexities of modern moral socialization. Therefore, future studies should focus more broadly on these variables, in particular through longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of different parenting methods and take into account the impact of globalization and technological developments. Only through more in-depth research and culturally sensitive analysis can parents be provided with more effective strategies to help children form a solid moral foundation in a complex society.

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