

The Impact of Harsh Parenting on the Self-efficacy of Chinese Middle School Students

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Abstract: As the level of education for all increases, family education is receiving more and more attention, and different parenting styles will have different impacts on children. This article mainly studies the impact of harsh parenting on Chinese middle school students' self-efficacy. In this study, 120 students of a middle school in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, were recruited, and a questionnaire survey was conducted using stratified cluster sampling method, and 120 valid data were obtained. The questionnaire included the respondents' basic information, harsh parenting scale, and general self-efficacy scale, and the Cronbach's α of the data was 0.76. Through comprehensive analyses, it is concluded that middle school students' self-efficacy was negatively correlated with their parents' harsh parenting, with the father's harsh language being the most significant in relation to the children's self-efficacy. In order to highlight the negative effects of harsh parenting and serve as a reminder to parents to be conscious of their own parenting style, this study aims to ascertain how strict parenting will impact children's sense of self-efficacy.

Keywords: Harsh Parenting, Self-Efficacy, Chinese Middle School Students, Father's Harsh Language

1. Introduction

In China, the proverb “Spare the rod spoil the child” is widely circulated among the people, and this proverb is summarized by the Chinese people as the concept of raising children and educating them to become successful, which also reflects people's life experience and wishes. Many parents are influenced by this mindset and choose to treat their children with harsh parenting. Harsh parenting includes negative parenting behaviors, negative emotions, and negative attitudes, mainly manifested as physical or verbal attacks from parents on their children [1]. The primary factor influencing middle school students' confidence in their capacity to succeed is, however, their parents' style of parenting [2]. Therefore, in this context, it is worth studying how harsh parenting influences self-efficacy.

The idea of self-efficacy was initially put forth by American social psychologist Bandura in 1977. This concept can be generally understood as a person's confidence and belief in their ability to complete a task or activity. By definition, self-efficacy means an individual's confidence that he or she can effectively use his or her knowledge, skills, and capacity to achieve personal goals [3]. Self-efficacy is also considered to be one of the most important factors influencing an individual's behavior.

Based on the above theories and research, this study intends to further explore how harsh parenting will affect Chinese middle school students' self-efficacy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Harsh Parenting

Harsh parenting includes negative parenting behaviors, negative emotions, and negative attitudes, mainly manifested as physical or verbal attacks from parents on their children [1]. Therefore, harsh parenting is categorized as harsh verbal, harsh emotion, harsh attitude, and harsh behavior.

Nowadays, Harsh Parenting Scale compiled by Wang is the most important measurement of harsh parenting. The Likert scale, with four points, makes up the scale, asking students to evaluate their parents separately. According to the study, the scale has good reliability [4].

There has been a long history of such research on the effects of parenting styles on children, in which the factors affecting harsh parenting include parental personality traits, parental cognitive factors, parental experience of being raised, child factors, family factors, and community factors and harsh parenting is closely linked to the externalization and internalization of the child's own problem [5]. Harsh parenting has a considerable positive predictive effect on children's aggressive behavior according to related study [6]. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence of harsh parenting on middle school students' self-efficacy, which is the problem internalized by harsh parenting.

2.2. Self-Efficacy

An American social psychologist Bandura was the first scholar who introduced the concept of self-efficacy. According to Bandura, a person's perceived efficacy expectations can be referred to as self-efficacy, which refers to a person's subjective judgment of whether or not he or she can effectively perform a certain behavior before engaging in a certain activity [3]. It is this sense of self-efficacy that becomes the direct motivation for behavior and determines human behavior [7]. Self-efficacy can also be generally understood as a person's confidence and belief in his or her capacity to accomplish their goals or an activity.

The General Self-efficacy Scale, which Schwarzer and his colleagues began developing in 1981, will be used in this study.

According to current research, self-efficacy has gradually penetrated into various fields, such as student learning education, mental health counseling, career choice, public health management, etc. Both domestic and international academics have given this subject a lot of attention in the realm of education. In the education field, most of the related research focuses on the relationship between students' learning stress, attribution, learning engagement, social anxiety, motivation, academic procrastination, personality traits, and mental health [8]. Research on self-efficacy in education has been categorized into two main perspectives: teacher teaching self-efficacy and student learning self-efficacy [9]. In contrast, adolescents with lower self-efficacy are more likely to develop maladaptive schemas about themselves. Research indicates that adolescents with higher self-efficacy are more likely to adopt appropriate cognitive appraisals and behavioral responses in the face of adverse events [10]. This study focuses on the self-efficacy of middle school students. The physiological and psychological of middle school students are in a time of rapid development, so the cultivation of self-efficacy is particularly critical in this period. However, existing research has studied more on the effects produced by self-efficacy and less on how it affects self-efficacy. In this paper, self-efficacy is taken as the dependent variable, and how the independent variable will affect the dependent variable is studied.

2.3. Relationship Between Harsh Parenting and Self-efficacy

The emotion regulation model suggests that parenting styles affect children's capacity to regulate their emotions [11]. Therefore, this study will use the Harsh Parenting Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale to investigate how harsh parenting will affect middle school students' self-efficacy.

Harsh parenting is a common phenomenon in many families, and harsh parenting inevitably affects children's own self-efficacy and therefore the children's sense of self-efficacy. However, it is crucial to develop children's self-efficacy, and we should avoid using harsh parenting to reduce children's self-efficacy. This study aims to explore the relationship between children's self-efficacy and harsh parenting and to show the disadvantages of harsh parenting.

3. Methodology

3.1. Harsh Parenting Scale

The harsh parenting in this study will be measured using Wang's Harsh Parenting Scale, which consists of four questions and includes both physical and verbal aggression dimensions [1]. The Likert Scale will be used, with each item scored according to the frequency with which the behavior occurs in the father (1="never", 5="always") and the frequency with which the behavior occurs in the mother (1="never", 5="always") were scored separately, and the higher the sum of the scores obtained, the deeper the respondent was exposed to harsh parenting, and vice versa. The Cronbach's α for this scale is 0.80, which means that the scale has good reliability.

3.2. General Self-efficacy Scale

Self-efficacy will be measured using the General Self-Efficacy Scale, which was created by Schwarzer and his associates starting in 1981. It began with twenty items, and it was later reduced to ten items and has been widely disseminated internationally [12][13][14]. The scale is measured on a 4-point Likert scale. The scale is unidimensional and consists of 10 questions on a scale of 1-4 points each. Higher scores indicate higher self-efficacy. The Cronbach's α of the scale is 0.87, which means that the scale has good reliability and is suitable for conducting the survey.

3.3. Research Process

The questionnaire surveyed respondents' basic information such as grade, gender, family structure, annual household income, and parents' marital status, in addition to the Severe Parenting Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale. In this research, thirty questionnaires were distributed on April 24, 2024 for pre-survey and they were collected on April 26, 2024 for sorting. A total of thirty valid questionnaires were collected in this pre-survey and the Cronbach's α was 0.785, so the reliability of this questionnaire was good. The formal survey was conducted on May 6, 2024, collected and collated on May 13, 2024, and was collated on May 16, 2024.

3.4. Data Analysis

The present investigation employed SPSS for data analysis, reliability validation of the Harsh Parenting Scale and the Self-Efficacy Scale, and correlation analysis to examine the association between middle school students' self-efficacy and harsh parenting.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Participants in this study were 120 middle school students of a middle school in southwestern China. Data for the study were gathered using the stratified cluster sampling approach, and participants answered questions online on a voluntary basis. There are three sections to the survey. The participants' basic information is included in the first section, and it includes the grade, gender, family situation, and annual household income. The second section contains the Harsh Parenting Scale, and the third part is the General Self-efficacy Scale. In order to avoid misunderstanding caused by language proficiency among participants, the survey has been translated into Mandarin, which is their mother tongue, before being distributed. In total, 203 surveys were sent out, and 121 were returned. The reason for the deletion of one from the data was his foreign nationality.

Of the 120 valid responses, 50.08% N=61 of the participants were male, and 49.2% N=59 were female, with first-year students accounting for 41.7% N=50, second-year students accounting for 30.0% (N=36), and third-year students accounting for 28.3% N=34, therefore, the participants covered students from first to third year of middle school. The parents of the majority of participants have harmonious relationships, accounting for 81.7% N=98, and the majority of participants live in nuclear families, accounting for 70.8% N=85 of the total participants.

Table 1 presents the harsh parenting of the mother. The average survey result indicated that most mothers of the participants raise their children in a gentle way, never or rarely using physical or verbal attacks on their children, and the standard deviation is less than one.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Mother's Harsh Parenting

	N	Minimum	maximum	average	Standard deviation
When I do something wrong, my mother gets angry at me and even yells at me.	120	1	5	2.45	.887
When I do something wrong, my mother hits me with her hands or kicks me with her feet.	120	1	5	1.63	.779
When I was punished, my mother used belts, rulers, or other tools to hit me.	120	1	4	1.40	.640
When I do something wrong, my mother will tell me to get out and even lock me outside.	120	1	4	1.28	.621

Table 2 presents the harsh parenting of the father. The average result indicated that most fathers of the participants never or rarely use physical or verbal attacks. However, in the first part of this item, "when I do something wrong, my father gets angry at me and even yells at me", the standard deviation is greater than one, indicating a high degree of data dispersion. Therefore, it can be concluded that among fathers who adopt harsh parenting toward their children, a large proportion will get angry and even yell at their children.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Father's Harsh Parenting

	N	Minimum	maximum	average	Standard deviation
When I do something wrong, my father gets angry at me and even yells at me.	120	1	5	2.12	1.022
When I do something wrong, my father hits me with his hands or kicks me with his feet.	120	1	4	1.25	.569
When I was punished, my father used belts, rulers, or other tools to hit me.	120	1	5	1.64	.887
When I do something wrong, my father will tell me to get out and even lock me outside.	120	1	5	1.55	.818

4.2. Correlations

Table 3: Correlation

		Mother's harsh language	Mother's harsh behavior	Father's harsh language	Father's harsh behavior
Mother's harsh language	Pearson Correlations		.634**	.368**	.261**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000	.000	.004
	N		120	120	120
Mother's harsh behavior	Pearson Correlations	.634**		.294**	.385**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000		.001	.000
	N	120		120	120
Father's harsh language	Pearson Correlations	.368**	.294**		.812**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.001		.000
	N	120	120		120
Father's harsh behavior	Pearson Correlations	.261**	.385**	.812**	
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.004	.000	.000	
	N	120	120	120	
General Self-Efficacy	Pearson Correlations	-.084	.081	-.230*	-.116
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.361	.381	.011	.205
	N	120	120	120	120

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level(2-tailed).

Table 3 indicates the correlation between the dimensions of the Harsh Parenting Scale and the total score of the General Self-Efficacy Scale. A significant positive correlation between either parent's harsh parenting behavior and the other parent's harsh parenting behavior has been found through this table, which suggests that parenting styles affect each other and that one parent's harsh parenting behavior contributes to the other parent's harsh parenting behavior. At the same time, there was a significant correlation between the two dimensions of parents' own harsh parenting behaviors, indicating that parents' harsh language often coexisted with harsh behaviors.

The table shows that the highest correlation with junior high school students' self-efficacy is the father's harsh language, which shows a negative correlation, which indicates that the greater the degree of the father's harsh language, the more significant the effect on junior high school students' general self-efficacy. The result shows that most Chinese parents never or seldom use harsh parenting when their children make mistakes, and the finding also shows that parents' harsh parenting behaviors are often influenced by the other spouse and that the presence of one dimension of harsh parenting by the parents themselves affects the other dimension of harsh parenting. Table 3 shows that fathers' harsh language is significantly positively correlated with self-efficacy, so fathers' harsh language has the greatest impact on students' self-efficacy among a range of harsh parenting styles.

4.3. Other Factors

Table 4: Other Influential Factors

		Mother's harsh language	Mother's harsh behavior	Father's harsh language	Father's harsh behavior
Family structure	Pearson Correlations	-.041	.043	.093	-.018
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.658	.644	.312	.842
	N	120	120	120	120
Annual household income	Pearson Correlations	.212*	.257**	.181*	.164
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.020	.005	.048	.074
	N	120	120	120	120
Grade	Pearson Correlations	-.027	.003	-.053	.129
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.766	.972	.566	.160
	N	120	120	120	120
Gender	Pearson Correlations	.003	-.046	-.032	-.099
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.974	.615	.726	.282
	N	120	120	120	120
Marital status of parents	Pearson Correlations	.011	.087	-.088	-.020
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.905	.347	.340	.830
	N	120	120	120	120

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level(2-tailed).

The survey also looked at the family structure, annual family income, grade, gender, and marital status of the respondents' parents, and Table 4 shows that annual family income has a significant positive correlation with the mother's harsh language, harsh behavior, and the father's harsh language.

This shows that the higher the annual family income the higher the degree of parental strictness in parenting, with the most significant correlation being the mother's strict parenting behavior. Therefore, according to the findings of this study, the father's harsh words will have the most obvious effect on junior high school students' self-efficacy, and the annual income of the family will affect the degree of parental harshness, so the higher the annual income of the family, the more attention should be paid to parenting behaviors, especially the father should pay attention to his own words when educating his children.

5. Conclusion

This study used a quantitative approach to examine parental harsh parenting and middle school students' self-efficacy. The results show that most parents treat their children gently and only a small percentage of parents use harsh parenting with their children. According to the 120 valid questionnaires in the study, the majority of middle school students have a certain level of self-efficacy, and the overall level of self-efficacy is positive. According to the correlation analysis, the significant correlation with children's self-efficacy is the father's harsh language, which shows a significant negative correlation, i.e., the higher the level of the father's harsh language, the lower the children's self-efficacy. Based on the study's findings, middle school students' self-efficacy is impacted by their parents' parenting styles, with fathers' harsh parenting having the most significant effect on middle school students' self-efficacy. Other variables show that there is a strong positive link between the level of harsh parenting and annual family income, so the higher the annual family income, the higher the probability of harsh parenting. Therefore, in families with higher annual household incomes, parents should pay more attention to the way they raise their children.

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