



The experience of parents implementing authoritarian parenting for their school-age children

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KEYWORDS

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Abstract

Objective: To explore families' experiences who use an authoritarian parenting style in caring for school-age children.

Method: This was a qualitative study employing a phenomenological approach. The sampling method was to interview parents of school-age children living in the Central Maluku district in Indonesia.

Results: The findings of this study generated the following themes: (1) parents strictly controlled their children to achieve the parental values and expectations, (2) children failed to meet the parental values and expectations, and (3) problems experienced by the children were the results of the parenting style.

Conclusions: This study suggested nursing professionals provide adequate information for parents with respect to parenting styles that may facilitate the optimal growth and development of the children. Future studies pertinent to cultural factors associated with authoritarian parenting were also suggested to better understand the cultural context of this parenting style.

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Introduction

A child is fundamentally dependent on his or her parents, including efforts to achieve developmental tasks. Obstacles in achieving the tasks of child development can cause feelings of inferiority, aggressiveness, and failure to socialize¹. Parents basically want their children to grow and develop normally, but sometimes parents do not aware that the parenting style they employ, such as authoritarian parenting, can have negative effects on their children.

Authoritarian parenting tends to be inconsistent, less nurturing, does not accept the autonomy or freedom of children has less response to and support for children, and uses

harsh discipline and punishment against children. Authoritarian parents require children to obey, and if they do not, they will be punished which can negatively affect their self-esteem and academic achievement². Corporal punishment is almost the same as child abuse, so if corporal punishment is done in an excessive manner, it can become child abuse³.

Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission in 2015 concluded that the number of child abuse cases increases every year. Based on a field study from 2011 to 2015, parenting-related cases were the second highest cases of child abuse in Indonesia, accounting for approximately 3,160 cases. In the province of Maluku, many parents still use authoritarian parenting accompanied by violent behaviors⁴.

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The negative impacts of authoritarian parenting must be anticipated and prevented. Thus, it is critical to provide sufficient information for parents to better understand appropriate parenting styles. In addition, the provision of information is also needed to help parents avoid authoritarian parenting.

Method

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of parents using the authoritarian parenting style in caring for their school-age children. A sample of six people participated in this study with the inclusion criteria of parents with school-age children using the authoritarian parenting style. The Parenting Style Questionnaire (Robinson, 1995) was used in the early stages to ensure that all participants in this study were using the authoritarian parenting style. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data.

This study was conducted in the Central Maluku district, Maluku province, after the ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Faculty of Nursing at Universitas Indonesia to ensure that the research would adhere to the ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for human dignity. Informed consent was given at the beginning of the meeting with the participants, accompanied by an explanation of the purpose, procedures, participants' rights, and how long participants would be involved in the research.

The study employed Colaizzi's method to process and analyze the data⁵. Six participants involved in this study as the data reached the saturation. Data validation was done by following four aspects: credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability.

Results

The participants in this study consisted of six parents in the Central Maluku district who used authoritarian parenting. They were 33 to 52 years old with school-age children. They lived in Maluku and came from several tribes in Indonesia, such as Buton, Bugis, Javanese, and Seram. The educational background of the participants was mostly limited to elementary school, and were low income for their socioeconomic status.

The findings of this study generated the following 3 main themes:

1. Parents strictly controlled their children to achieve the parental values and expectations.
2. Children failed to meet the parental values and expectations.
3. Problems experienced by the children were the results of the parenting style.

Theme 1: parents strictly controlled their children to achieve the parental values and expectations

In this study, parents revealed that in performing everyday parenting, they usually control the activities of their children by prioritizing the things that are considered important

for children, such as forcing them to study. This was demonstrated in the following statements:

"...remember to study" (P1).

"...beware of bad marks on the test!" (P4).

"I want them to do well in school, so that they could be successful" (P2).

Besides pressuring their children to study, parents overly controlled with whom their children would spend leisure time. Furthermore, parents were likely to limit their children's playtime and activities. This was revealed in the statements from the participants:

"When playing, they must remember the time" (P1).

"...choose diligent friends to play with" (P1).

Parents assume that a child must help their parents at home, particularly for family with low socioeconomic status. This is also a culture where the parents were born and raised with an authoritarian upbringing. Of the six participants, four came from outside the Moluccas, but grew up with the culture of Maluku and were regarded as "local people from Saparua." Saparua is an island in Maluku known as a community who usually talk with high tone voice and harsh behavior. This was revealed in statements from the participants:

"When I come home from working, I want they cleaned house...mutually help each other. I do help for fulfilling the family financial" (P5).

"We were born and raised in Saparua, so my mother raised us like people from Saparua" (P6).

Parents who used the authoritarian parenting style believed their strict attitudes could help their children achieve the intended values and standards that are considered important for the good of their children in the future.

Theme 2: Children failed to meet the parental values and expectations

In day-to-day parenting, parents revealed that they usually punished their children when they made mistakes, but sometimes they felt guilty and remorseful after punishing them. This was indicated in the following statements:

"I was angry and stated, 'Do as I said,' ... sometimes with a raised voice, and undoubtedly pinched my child because he was too rebel and did not listen to my advice" (P6).

"... when my children started to whimper, I got angry, but when they looked sad, I repented, then bought (what they wanted)" (P1).

According to participants, their attitudes did not necessarily discourage the children. Their children, in fact, resisted and refused their parents' orders. This can be seen in the following statements:

"A rebel child" (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6).

"Made mistakes, became aware for two days and then repeat the same mistakes" (P1).

Apparently, authoritarian parenting with strict parental controls and pressure is not an effective way to achieve intended behaviors in children.

Theme 3: Problems experienced by children were the results of the parenting style

The results of the study revealed that parents offered insufficient information to their children and gave no opportunities for children to express their opinions with respect to the punishment they received. This was demonstrated in the following statements:

“They silently realized their mistakes” (P1).

“Every time he whimpered and made wishes, I replied no” (P3).

Parents indicated academic, behavioral, and emotional problems experienced by their children, as presented in the following statements:

“He was scolded in the school because of not making homework” (P1).

“Disturb each other” (P2, P4, P5, and P6).

“My child has bad temper” (P1).

Besides failing to achieve good behaviors, authoritarian parenting hinders children’s development and causes behavioral problems.

Discussion

One of the values instilled in children is learning achievement, in which parents strictly command their children to be diligent and study hard. This might be done when parents care too much about achievements. In this study, there were three participants who showed concerns for the academic achievements of their children. Accordingly, they demanded that their children achieve the intended values and expectations by giving them constant reminders and even using threats.

The use of threats, however, can cause fear and depression. There is a negative correlation between authoritarian parenting style and academic achievement, meaning highly authoritarian parenting causes lower academic achievement⁶.

All participants in this study have a middle or lower socioeconomic status where the financial constraints may limit the parents’ ability to provide the best education for their children. The socioeconomic status of the family is associated with the amount of the family’s investment in children’s education⁷. Children who come from a low-income family would tend to have a lower academic achievement when compared to those who come from a higher-income family.

The control over children’s playtime is, likewise, relative to socioeconomic status. The parents with a low socioeconomic status tend to control the freedom of their children to play, and are more likely to become authoritarian and focused on maintaining the discipline and obedience of their children⁸.

In our study, parents also involved their children in housework. This occurred especially when family economic circumstances were insufficient to meet the needs of everyday life and required mothers to work in order to provide additional income for the family.

The parenting style might also be influenced by the parents’ upbringing and culture. Culture can shape the values and beliefs of a society and can be passed down from one generation to the next, or can be transferred from one place to another through acculturation⁹.

Authoritarian parents are sometimes inconsistent with rules. Consequently, rules have no deterrent effects for the children. Our study demonstrated that the children were likely to be rebellious and disruptive. Also, despite the children occasionally adhering to the rules, they were more likely to break the rules. Thus, authoritarian parenting might be not fully successful in directing children to perform desirable behaviors. Parental inconsistency in disciplining children is significantly related to behavioral problems and the absence of empathy in children¹⁰.

The findings of our study indicated difficulties in child development, including learning, behavioral, and emotional problems, and communication between parents and children. Parents with strict control over children’s activities could make the children become more dependent on their parents. Our study showed that the children skipped their homework when they were not supervised. Research demonstrated consistent results with this study in Japan, where students with authoritarian parents had lower academic motivation and achievement¹¹. Nevertheless, the results were contradictory with the study in the United States showing that authoritarian parenting benefitted children by improving their academic achievement.

Our study indicated that children were rebellious and perverse, which might be due to the imitation of their parents’ harsh behavior. Therefore, children learned to act aggressively from their parents¹². Another study claimed that there was a significant correlation between depressed mothers and behaviors in children¹³. Depressed mothers were likely to use harsh discipline with their children, thereby contributing to the higher risks of externalizing behaviors amongst children.

Finally, the findings of the study showed the consequences of authoritarian parenting on the children’s emotions. The children had difficulty managing their emotions. There was a clear association between parenting patterns and children’s emotions¹⁴. The study indicated that negative parental control resulted in a decline of emotional intelligence in the children. Children raised with an authoritarian parenting style had lower psychological health, including a negative self-concept¹⁴.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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