Parental empathy and behavior: A study on discipline, punishment, and psychological control

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A B S T R A C T

Parenting behaviors strongly influence children's emotional, cognitive, and social development. Parental empathy, including cognitive empathy, emotional resonance, and emotional dissonance, shapes disciplinary practices and parent–child relationships. This study examines levels of parental empathy and parenting behaviors in the areas of discipline, punishment, and psychological control, and explores how emotional and cognitive involvement in parenting affects disciplinary approaches and family interactions. Data were collected from 349 parents using validated instruments, including the Emotional and Cognitive Empathy Scale and the Parenting Behavior Scale–Short Form with the Psychological Control Scale. Descriptive statistical analyses showed that parents mainly used non-aggressive discipline methods (M = 1.61, SD = 0.85) and reported high emotional resonance (M = 2.15, SD = 0.54). Punitive behaviors were rare (M = 0.47, SD = 0.49), while psychological control was used at a moderate level (M = 0.56, SD = 0.53). Emotional resonance was positively associated with positive parenting behaviors, and cognitive empathy showed a moderate relationship with constructive disciplinary practices. Overall, the findings highlight the important role of parental empathy in promoting effective parenting and healthy family dynamics, while also indicating that the use of psychological control and lower levels of cognitive empathy remain areas for improvement.

1. Introduction

Parenting has a crucial influence on children's development, significantly affecting their emotional, social, and cognitive growth. Parental methods of discipline, communication, and emotional support establish the foundation for essential life skills such as self-regulation, problem-solving, and interpersonal competence (Aneesh et al., 2024; Landry et al., 2006). Beyond childhood, these formative events impact long-term results, including academic success, mental well-being, and social functioning. Effective parenting techniques cultivate circumstances that promote resilience and personal development, but ineffective ones can hinder these results, leading to developmental difficulties that

endure into adulthood (Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). Comprehending the intricacies of parenting actions and their correlation with empathy is essential for cultivating positive family dynamics and enhancing child development outcomes.

Parenting practices have evolved with socio-economic and cultural changes. Earlier models often emphasized authoritarian control and punitive actions. These strategies sought to cultivate obedience and conformity but sometimes lacked the emotional warmth essential for developing stable bonds. Extensive research has increasingly demonstrated the dangers of severe punishment methods, correlating them with heightened aggression, mental instability, and psychological discomfort in children. These findings have prompted a transition towards parenting methodologies that emphasize empathy, emotional bonding, and constructive disciplinary techniques (Hajal and Paley, 2020; Shapiro and White, 2014).

Positive discipline is now broadly recognized as a constructive parenting method that fosters accountability, autonomy, and reciprocal respect

between parents and children. Unlike punishment-based approaches, positive discipline aims to instruct children through problem-solving, promoting self-reflection, and cultivating a feeling of responsibility (Winkler et al., 2017). Notwithstanding the increasing inclination towards constructive methodologies, nuanced forms of manipulation and control—designated as psychological control—remain prevalent in numerous parenting techniques. In contrast to physical punishment, which is explicit and readily recognizable, psychological control functions subtly, frequently appearing as guilt induction, affection withdrawal, or the invalidation of a child's emotional experiences (Choe et al., 2023).

The adverse consequences of psychological control are extensively documented. Studies demonstrate that emotionally manipulative parenting can diminish a child's self-esteem, cultivate anxiety and melancholy, and strain parent-child connections. Such behaviors impede the cultivation of trust and autonomy, which are essential components of healthy psychological development, especially in adolescents with vulnerable personality profiles (Le et al., 2023). Understanding the reasons behind certain parental behaviors and their impact on children is crucial for developing targeted interventions that promote healthier, more respectful family relationships.

Empathy is essential to effective parenting and nurturing healthy parent-child relationships. It allows parents to recognize, comprehend, and suitably address their children's emotional needs, hence cultivating robust emotional connections and trust. Cognitive empathy is comprehending the feelings and viewpoints of others, enabling parents to foresee their children's needs and respond judiciously. Affective resonance denotes parents' emotional involvement and ability to empathize with their children's emotions, hence fostering relational warmth and intimacy. Affective dissonance, conversely, denotes adverse or antagonistic emotional responses to the emotions of others, frequently undermining parent-child relationships and cultivating atmospheres characterized by emotional insecurity.

Parents exhibiting elevated empathy are more adept at engaging in loving and supporting actions, fostering favorable emotional and social development in their offspring (Brooks, 2023; Decety and Holvoet, 2021). Cognitive empathy enables parents to foresee their children's needs and provide constructive counsel, whilst affective resonance fosters emotional intimacy and trust. In contrast, parents displaying affective dissonance may disregard or deny their children's emotions, engaging in emotionally detrimental behaviors such as humiliating or belittling, which can result in strained relationships and negative developmental consequences.

This study has practical implications for family-centered therapies, alongside its theoretical contributions. By finding effective techniques to augment parental empathy and diminish psychological control, educators and mental health professionals can develop targeted programs that foster healthy parenting behaviors. Interventions may encompass empathy training, emotional intelligence workshops, and strategies to promote open communication and collaborative problem-solving among families. These programs seek to enhance parent-child interactions, cultivate emotional resilience, and promote children's comprehensive development. This study enhances the understanding of parental conduct and emotional engagement by analyzing these fundamental processes. The objective is to equip families with evidence-based methods that promote caring, developmentally supportive environments, establishing a foundation for enduring well-being, resilience, and success in children's lives.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The research encompassed 349 parents, offering an extensive analysis of their demographic and educational attributes. Of the participants, 82 were male (23.5%), but a substantial majority, 267 (76.5%), were female. The gender distribution indicates a significant participation of mothers in the study, maybe reflecting cultural or societal roles in caregiving and educational activities. Parents were classified according to the educational levels of their children, spanning from primary to high school. The predominant group comprised parents of Grade 7 students (99 participants, 28.4%), closely followed by parents of Grade 8 students (93 participants, 26.6%). Parents of Grade 6 children comprised 69 participants (19.8%), whilst parents of Grade 9 children were 48 participants (13.8%). A limited percentage of parents had children in Grade 4 (1 participant, 0.3%), Grade 5 (21 participants, 6.0%), Grade 10 (8 participants, 2.3%), and Grade 12 (2 participants, 0.6%). Notably, there were no parents with children in Grade 11, and 8 participants (2.3%) were classified under a "Others" category, potentially encompassing children in non-traditional or special education programs. The educational attainment of the parents exhibited considerable variation. A majority of participants (203, 58.2%) possessed a high school education, indicating a significant proportion of parents with secondary education. A minority had attained a college degree (15 participants, 4.3%) or completed undergraduate studies (49 individuals, 14.0%). Furthermore, 12 participants (3.7%) indicated possessing graduate-level education, signifying a rather minor cohort of parents with advanced academic credentials. Significantly, 69 participants (19.8%) classified their academic level as "Others," potentially indicating diverse or nontraditional educational trajectories that may not conform to conventional academic classifications. This heterogeneous sample of parents, comprising different genders, children's

grade levels, and educational backgrounds, offers significant insights into the population being examined. The prevalence of female participants, the extensive representation throughout children's educational levels, and the diversity of parental educational qualifications significantly enhance the research findings and implications (Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of participants

Characteristics		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	23.5
	Female	267	76.5
Children's grade	Grade 4	1	0.3
	Grade 5	21	6.0
	Grade 6	69	19.8
	Grade 7	99	28.4
	Grade 8	93	26.6
	Grade 9	48	13.8
	Grade 10	8	2.3
	Grade 11	0	0
	Grade 12	2	0.6
	Others	8	2.3
Academic Level	High school	203	58.2
	College	15	4.3
	Undergraduate	49	14.0
	Graduate	12	3.7
	Others	69	19.8
Total		349	100

2.2. Measurements

This study employed two validated instruments, the Affective and Cognitive Measure of Empathy Scale (ACME) and the Parenting Behavior Scale—Short Form with Psychological Control Scale, to thoroughly evaluate parenting behaviors and dimensions of empathy. These measures facilitated a comprehensive analysis of essential constructs pertaining to parenting methods and empathy.

The affective and cognitive empathy scale, created by Vachon and Lynam (2016), assesses empathy through three subscales. The Cognitive Empathy subscale comprises 12 items and assesses the capacity to comprehend and interpret the emotions of others, exhibiting a reliability rate of 0.80. The Emotional Resonance subscale comprises 12 items that evaluate emotional engagement and connection to the experiences of others, exhibiting a reliability coefficient of 0.67. The Emotional Dissonance subscale consists of 12 items that assess negative or hostile emotional responses towards others, exhibiting a reliability coefficient of 0.82. The total dependability of ACME is 0.81. Participants evaluated each topic on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), yielding comprehensive insights into parents' emotional and cognitive reactions.

The Parenting Behavior Scale—Short Form, in conjunction with the Psychological Control Scale created by Van Heel et al. (2019), assessed essential parenting behaviors. The Discipline subscale, with 4 items, evaluated the remedial tactics employed by parents to direct their children's behavior, exhibiting a reliability coefficient of 0.81. The Punishment subscale assessed punitive techniques, encompassing verbal or physical reprimands, with 5 items, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.70. The Psychological Control subscale comprised 7 questions and assessed emotionally manipulative parenting techniques, including guilt induction and affection withdrawal, with a reliability rate of 0.76.

The overall scale dependability was indicated as 0.83. Each item was evaluated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Almost Always) to assess the frequency of these behaviors in parental daily contacts.

Collectively, these assessment instruments provide substantial and dependable insights into the complex dynamics of parental conduct and empathy, facilitating a thorough examination of the factors affecting parenting choices and emotional involvement.

2.3. Procedure

The data gathering methodology for this study was meticulously crafted to guarantee precision, thoroughness, and ethical integrity in participation. The research protocol commenced with the recruitment of participants, specifically focusing on parents of children at different educational stages. Recruitment was conducted via community networks, parent-teacher associations, social media platforms, and local educational institutions. Participants received an invitation letter outlining the study's aims, advantages, risks, confidentiality guarantees, and directions for participation.

Before data collection, participants were obligated to examine and electronically sign an informed consent form. This document delineated their voluntary involvement, confidentiality protocols, and entitlement to resign from the study at any moment without repercussions. Furthermore, participants were assured that their replies would remain anonymous and would be utilized solely for academic research objectives. The structured questionnaire, which included the Emotional and Cognitive Empathy Scale (ACME) and the Parenting Behavior Scale - Short Form with Psychological Control Scale, was distributed in both online and paper formats to cater to participant preferences and enhance response rates. The online survey was disseminated via a secure platform, enabling

respondents to complete it at their convenience, and paper surveys were conducted during designated periods at schools or community centers for individuals lacking digital access.

Participants were directed to react candidly and reflectively, evaluating each topic using the supplied 5-point Likert scales. The survey contained explicit instructions and sample questions to guarantee that participants comprehended the grading system and delivered uniform results. Each participant necessitated roughly 10-20 minutes to finalize the survey. Upon submission, data from both digital and paper versions were meticulously examined for completeness. Surveys with absent responses beyond a certain threshold were omitted from the study. Automated checks were implemented to identify missing or inconsistent data entries in online responses. Paper responses were meticulously examined to verify data accuracy during transcription into the dataset.

During the data collection period, research workers were available to resolve participant inquiries or concerns through email or in-person consultations. Participants received consistent follow-ups and reminders to promote prompt survey completion and guarantee a comprehensive dataset. Upon the completion of data collection, it was securely stored in encrypted digital formats, accessible just to approved study workers. This guaranteed adherence to data protection rules and maintained participant confidentiality.

This rigorous method of data gathering established a dependable basis for the ensuing study, producing significant insights into the intricate relationship between parental behaviors and empathy.

2.4. Data analysis

The data obtained from the surveys were analyzed utilizing SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were computed to encapsulate participant responses and furnish an overview of parental actions and empathy levels. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed for each subscale and the overall scales to evaluate their internal consistency and reliability. These dependability metrics guaranteed that the instruments delivered consistent and precise measurements of the structures being examined.

3. Result

This study examined parents' perspectives on parenting behaviors in three domains: discipline, psychological control, and punishment. The dimensions are listed according to their reported mean scores based on the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation).

As shown in Table 2, disciplinary behaviors, characterized as corrective measures intended to direct children's conduct, were employed by parents to a modest extent. Parents predominantly indicated administering punishment when their children committed plainly forbidden behaviors ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.10$). Consequences for rule violations, such as returning home tardily without justification or neglecting to fulfill household responsibilities, were prevalent ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.01$). Likewise, parents employed discipline for bothersome behaviors such as whining or resistance ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.00$). Revoking privileges, such as television access or outings, occurred with slightly less frequency ($M = 1.53$, $SD = 1.16$). The data suggest that parents utilized discipline tactics that were mild and predominantly non-aggressive.

Instances of physical punishment, which are more severe, were recorded at markedly lower levels than general disciplinary measures. Physical punishment of children for misconduct was seldom ($M = 0.48$, $SD = 0.76$), as was striking them for misbehavior or disobedience ($M = 1.11$, $SD = 1.02$). More severe actions, such as physically pushing children during arguments ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.54$), were recorded as exceedingly rare. Verbal punitive behaviors, such as insulting children ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.66$) or slapping them for not fulfilling pledges ($M = 0.24$, $SD = 0.55$), were seldom. The results demonstrate that parents predominantly refrained from employing severe physical or verbal punishment in their parenting methods.

Psychological control, defined by emotionally manipulative activities, exhibited a lower mean score than discipline yet occurred more frequently than punishment. The predominant behaviors in this category encompassed diverting the topic when children sought to engage in discussion ($M = 0.63$, $SD = 0.91$) and interrupting children during their speech ($M = 0.60$, $SD = 0.81$). Emotional withdrawal behaviors, including the refusal to communicate with children until the parent experienced satisfaction ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 0.98$), and reduced intimacy during disagreements ($M = 0.50$, $SD = 0.79$), were seldom. Attributing family problems to children ($M = 0.28$, $SD = 0.66$) and referencing prior errors during conflicts ($M = 0.77$, $SD = 0.91$) occurred infrequently. These findings indicate that psychological control was utilized seldom, however, more frequently than physical or verbal punishment.

The overall mean score for parental behaviors across all factors was $M = 0.79$, $SD = 0.47$. Discipline was the most commonly reported behavior ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 0.85$), followed by psychological control ($M = 0.56$, $SD = 0.53$) and punishment ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.49$). The results indicate a prevailing inclination among parents in the study to prefer corrective and non-aggressive discipline methods, while reducing punitive and manipulative behaviors.

This research investigated parental empathy through three dimensions: cognitive empathy, affective resonance, and affective dissonance. The descriptive statistics for each dimension and associated items offer a comprehensive insight into parents' emotional and cognitive reactions to the

sentiments of others. As shown in Table 3, cognitive empathy refers to the capacity to comprehend and analyze the feelings of another. Parents indicated a significant consensus regarding challenges in comprehending emotions. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement, "*I am not good at*

understanding other people's emotions" (M = 2.43, SD = 1.34). They similarly expressed difficulties in discerning the emotions of others, as seen by the statement, "*I have a hard time figuring out what someone else is feeling*" (*M* = 1.81, *SD* = 1.30).

Table 2: The perspective of parents about parenting behaviors

Items	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
When my child doesn't follow a rule (for example, he/she comes home late without a good reason; he/she doesn't complete a chore), I punish him/her.	1.56	1.01
I will punish my child when he/she does something annoying (like whining, defying me, or being argumentative).	1.56	1.00
When my child does something wrong, I will punish him/her by taking away things he/she likes (for example, not being allowed to watch TV, not being allowed to go out, having to come home early, having to go to bed earlier than usual).	1.53	1.16
When my child does something he/she is not allowed to do, I punish him.	1.79	1.10
Discipline	1.61	0.85
I slap my child when he/she does something wrong.	0.48	0.76
I hit my child when he/she is naughty and/or disobedient.	1.11	1.02
When I have a conflict with my child, I often push him/her hard.	0.23	0.54
I insult my child when he/she does something I disapprove of.	0.30	0.66
I slap my child when he/she doesn't keep a promise.	0.24	0.55
Punishment	0.47	0.49
I change the subject whenever my child has something he/she wants to say.	0.63	0.91
I interrupt my child when he/she speaks	0.60	0.81
I blame my child when other family members have problems.	0.28	0.66
I bring up (restate or refer to) my child's past mistakes when he/she criticizes me.	0.77	0.91
I am less intimate with my child when he/she disagrees with me.	0.50	0.79
I ignore my child when he/she disappoints me.	0.48	0.76
When my child upsets me, I won't talk to him/her until he/she makes me happy again.	0.67	0.98
Psychological control	0.56	0.53
Total	0.79	0.47

Table 3: The affective and cognitive measures of empathy of parents

Items	M	SD
I have a hard time reading people's emotions	1.81	1.24
I can tell when someone is afraid	2.39	1.36
It's obvious when people are pretending to be happy	2.16	1.33
I usually understand why people feel the way they do	2.32	1.25
I have a hard time figuring out what someone else is feeling	1.81	1.30
I can tell when people are about to lose their temper	2.04	1.34
I can usually predict how someone will feel	1.69	1.30
I can usually tell how people are feeling	1.72	1.30
I am not good at understanding other people's emotions	2.43	1.34
I can usually guess what's making someone angry	1.95	1.34
People don't have to tell me when they're sad, I can see it in their faces	2.40	1.37
I find it hard to tell when someone is sad	1.64	1.32
Cognitive empathy	2.03	0.73
It makes me feel good to help someone in need	3.50	1.12
I get excited to give someone a gift that I think they will enjoy	3.26	1.16
I don't worry much about hurting people's feelings	0.61	1.15
I don't really care if other people feel happy	1.05	1.38
I don't really care if people are feeling depressed	0.85	1.20
Other people's feelings don't bother me at all	0.62	1.03
I feel awful when I hurt someone's feelings	2.79	1.54
Other people's misfortunes don't bother me much	1.22	1.30
If I see that I am doing something that hurts someone, I will quickly stop	3.41	1.22
I often try to help people feel better when they are upset	3.43	1.05
I enjoy making others happy	3.37	1.07
People have told me that I'm insensitive	1.68	1.31
Affective resonance	2.15	0.54
I think it's fun to push people around once and a while	0.85	1.24
I love watching people get angry	0.28	0.74
I enjoy seeing strangers get scared	0.20	0.64
When my friends are having a good time I often get angry	0.26	0.76
People who are cheery disgust me	0.21	0.74
I like making other people uncomfortable	0.46	1.12
I get a kick out of making other people feel stupid	0.19	0.63
When my friends get angry I often feel like laughing	0.38	0.87
Sometimes I enjoy seeing people cry	0.30	0.77
Sometimes it's funny to see people get humiliated	0.18	0.61
If I could get away with it, there are some people I would enjoy hurting	0.23	0.71
I admit that I enjoy irritating other people	0.40	0.89
Affective dissonance	0.33	0.48
Total	1.51	0.41

Moderate scores were observed for questions indicative of emotional recognition abilities, such as "*I can tell when someone is afraid*" (*M* = 2.39, *SD* = 1.36) and "*It's obvious when people are pretending to be happy*" (*M* = 2.16, *SD* = 1.33). Reduced scores were seen for items evaluating the capacity to

anticipate emotions, including "*I can usually predict how someone will feel*" (*M* = 1.69, *SD* = 1.30) and "*I can usually tell how people are feeling*" (*M* = 1.72, *SD* = 1.30). The findings suggest that although some parents comprehend emotional signs, many struggle to appropriately identify or anticipate the emotions

of others. Affective resonance, indicating emotional connection and response, recorded the highest mean score among the three dimensions. Parents indicated significant emotional involvement, especially in actions that enhance well-being. The highest score was recorded for the statement, "*It makes me feel good to help someone in need*" (*M* = 3.50, *SD* = 1.12), followed by "*I often try to help people feel better when they are upset*" (*M* = 3.43, *SD* = 1.05) and "*I enjoy making others happy*" (*M* = 3.37, *SD* = 1.07). Conversely, parents exhibited considerable disagreement with statements indicative of insensitivity, such as "*Other people's feelings don't bother me at all*" (*M* = 0.62, *SD* = 1.03) and "*I don't worry much about hurting people's feelings*" (*M* = 0.61, *SD* = 1.15). These findings underscore parents' favorable emotional inclinations and their ability to engage in prosocial acts, fostering robust emotional bonds with others.

Affective dissonance, indicative of negative or hostile emotional responses, exhibited the lowest mean score (*M* = 0.33, *SD* = 0.48). Parents vehemently opposed assertions suggesting detrimental or hostile conduct. The lowest mean scores were seen for "*Sometimes it's funny to see people get humiliated*" (*M* = 0.18, *SD* = 0.61) and "*I enjoy seeing strangers get scared*" (*M* = 0.20, *SD* = 0.64). Correspondingly, minimal scores were recorded for statements such as "*If I could get away with it, there are some people I would enjoy hurting*" (*M* = 0.23, *SD* = 0.71) and "*I admit that I enjoy irritating other people*" (*M* = 0.40, *SD* = 0.89). The findings suggest that parents infrequently display aggressive behaviors or gain pleasure from the distress of others, highlighting their primarily positive emotional disposition.

The comprehensive empathy score, aggregating all dimensions, was *M* = 1.51, *SD* = 0.41. Affective resonance had the highest mean (*M* = 2.15, *SD* = 0.54), followed by cognitive empathy (*M* = 2.03, *SD* = 0.73). Affective dissonance exhibited the lowest mean score (M=0.33, SD=0.48), signifying negligible negative emotional inclinations among parents. The findings indicate that parents typically exhibit a robust emotional connection and responsiveness, as evidenced by elevated affective resonance scores, signifying their dedication to assisting and supporting others.

4. Discussion

This study's results provide an in-depth analysis of parental behavior and empathy, highlighting positive trends and pinpointing areas for additional improvement. These findings underscore the complex dynamics of parental guidance, boundary-setting, and emotional bonding with children. The study examines four dimensions—discipline, punishment, psychological control, and empathy—that are essential in influencing parenting practices and their effects on child outcomes.

Discipline was identified as the predominant parenting behavior, indicating parents' dependence on remedial strategies to direct their children's conduct. These methods were especially apparent in responses about explicit rule infractions, such as arriving home tardily without authorization or failing to complete assigned responsibilities. This discovery corresponds with Baumrind's (1971) authoritative parenting model, which underscores explicit expectations and stringent boundaries while fostering a supportive environment. The moderate mean ratings for disciplinary behaviors indicate that parents exercise restraint in employing corrective measures, striving to maintain discipline as constructive and educational rather than punitive. Research continually demonstrates the effectiveness of these methods, indicating that constructive discipline fosters favorable child outcomes, such as enhanced emotional regulation, greater problem-solving abilities, and superior academic performance (Dupper, 2010; Van Pham, 2024). These findings underscore the necessity of balancing boundary-setting with the encouragement of children's autonomy.

Punishment, characterized by physical or verbal punitive measures, was documented at markedly reduced levels in comparison to discipline. In this study, parents infrequently employed physical methods, such as slapping or beating their children, while behaviors like pushing during confrontations were virtually absent. This diminished dependence on punitive measures signifies wider cultural changes in perceptions of physical punishment, influenced by an increasing recognition of its possible detrimental effects. Research indicates that physical punishment correlates with negative consequences in children, such as elevated aggression, heightened anxiety, and inadequate emotional control. The diminishing use of these behaviors by parents underscores their inclination towards non-aggressive approaches, consistent with evidence-based guidelines for fostering healthy child development. By eschewing severe punitive methods, parents foster an environment conducive to trust, emotional security, and positive familial ties. These findings should be interpreted in light of the Vietnamese cultural context, where Confucian traditions, collectivist orientations, and rapid socio-economic transitions uniquely shape parenting compared to Western and East Asian settings.

Psychological control, characterized by emotionally manipulative acts, occurred less frequently than discipline but more often than physical punishment. Parents indicated activities such as diverting the topic when children sought to articulate their thoughts or interjecting during their speech, implying subtle attempts to impose dominance. While these behaviors were not widespread, their potential adverse effects on children's mental well-being are well-documented. Psychological control is associated with results like diminished self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and strained parent-child relationships (Rogers et al., 2020), which may increase risk behaviors like deception, particularly in adolescents experiencing

loneliness and low self-esteem (Nguyen-Thi et al., 2020). The results highlight the necessity of addressing these behaviors through interventions that foster open communication and emotional affirmation. Parenting education programs can provide parents with the resources to diminish manipulative behaviors and promote more supportive relationships with their children, improving emotional resilience and relationship quality (Bu et al., 2024; Çakmak Tolan and Bolluk Uğur, 2024).

Empathy has become a vital aspect of effective parenting, with affective resonance exhibiting the greatest levels among the three characteristics of empathy. Parents exhibited significant emotional involvement, as shown by their regular displays of affection and altruistic actions. Expressions like "It brings me joy to assist someone in need" and "I take pleasure in bringing happiness to others" received notably high scores, indicating parents' ability to establish emotional connections with others. The capacity to empathize with others' feelings is essential for establishing robust, trusting connections and maintaining a nurturing home atmosphere (Avasthi, 2010; Covey, 2014). Affective resonance strengthens parent-child relationships and fosters children's social-emotional development, facilitating empathy, collaboration, and interpersonal skills.

Cognitive empathy, defined as the ability to comprehend and interpret the emotions of others, has shown moderate levels among parents. Some parents had a keen understanding of emotional cues, whereas others encountered difficulties in recognizing or anticipating emotional states. Statements such as "I struggle to comprehend others' emotions" and "I find it challenging to discern another person's feelings" underscore these challenges. The findings indicate diversity in parents' cognitive empathy, likely affected by individual variances in emotional intelligence and social experiences. Studies demonstrate that cognitive empathy is essential for effective parenting since it allows parents to foresee their children's needs and react suitably (De Paul and Guibert, 2008; Krauthamer Ewing et al., 2019). Targeted interventions, such as emotional intelligence training and reflective listening workshops, may assist parents in enhancing this skill, resulting in more sensitive and supportive parenting practices.

Affective dissonance, indicative of negative or antagonistic emotional inclinations, recorded the lowest ratings in all dimensions. Parents vehemently opposed statements implying amusement at the distress or misfortune of others, such as "At times, it is amusing to witness individuals being humiliated." This data suggests that parents in this study typically refrain from aggressive or antagonistic behaviors, consistent with positive parenting methods. Reducing affective dissonance is crucial for fostering emotionally safe family environments, as studies indicate that aggressive behaviors can erode trust and result in strained parent-child relationships (Baker et al., 2020; Rothman et al., 2017). The little presence of negative behaviors in this study underscores parents' dedication to cultivating supportive and sympathetic relationships with their children.

The results of this study have considerable significance for parenting behaviors, family relations, and interventions designed to foster healthy child development. The significant focus on constructive disciplinary procedures underscores the necessity of directing children through positive reinforcement and remedial acts instead of punitive or manipulative tactics. These methods cultivate accountability and autonomy in children, consistent with research that authoritative parenting correlates with enhanced emotional intelligence, improved academic performance, and superior social skills. Parenting education programs can utilize these findings to highlight non-aggressive disciplinary measures, providing parents with resources to effectively manage challenging behaviors and align with students' perceived needs for academic and emotional support in times of difficulty (Van-Huynh and Tran-Chi, 2019). The elevated levels of emotional resonance seen among parents highlight the essential need for emotional connection in successful parenting. Parents exhibiting robust empathy, especially through emotional support and prosocial activities, foster safe relationships and emotional resilience in their children. These findings indicate the necessity for parenting seminars and therapies that augment emotional attunement, especially for parents who may experience difficulties with cognitive empathy. By enhancing their capacity to discern and comprehend their children's emotions, parents can cultivate more robust bonds and offer more personalized emotional support. The moderate prevalence of psychological control and the heterogeneity in cognitive empathy underscore areas where focused interventions may prove advantageous. Initiatives aimed at enhancing communication abilities, diminishing emotionally manipulative conduct, and promoting transparent discussion might alleviate the adverse impacts of psychological control. Furthermore, emotional intelligence training designed for parents could improve their cognitive empathy, allowing them to more effectively comprehend their children's needs and respond appropriately. Educational institutions and community organizations could significantly contribute to facilitating access to these resources, ensuring that parents receive the necessary support to cultivate caring and compassionate home situations. The limited levels of punitive behaviors and emotional dissonance seen in this study indicate an increasing awareness among parents regarding the necessity of eschewing harsh or confrontational behaviors. These findings underscore the significance of cultural and societal endeavors to advocate for healthy parenting methods, encompassing public awareness campaigns and legislation initiatives designed to diminish dependence on physical punishment. By leveraging

these strengths and addressing areas for enhancement, interventions can assist parents in cultivating emotionally supportive and developmentally enriching environments for their children.

Although the study offers significant insights, certain limitations must be recognized. The dependence on self-reported data may lead to response biases, as parents might underreport acts deemed socially unacceptable, such as punitive measures or psychological control. Future research may include observational or third-party evaluations to corroborate self-reported data and offer a more objective perspective on parenting techniques. The study's cross-sectional methodology restricts the capacity to determine causal links among parenting behaviors, empathy, and child outcomes. Future research should also employ inferential statistical analyses (e.g., correlations, regression, mediation models) to test the strength and mechanisms of these associations. A longitudinal study would facilitate a more nuanced comprehension of the interaction between these variables throughout time and their impact on developmental trajectories. The study also neglects to consider potential bidirectional effects, like how children's behaviors and temperaments may influence parental responses, which could yield a more thorough understanding of family dynamics as evidenced during periods of social disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where parent-adolescent conflict intensified (Vu et al., 2022). Third, although the sample composition is diverse, it may not accurately represent larger populations. Cultural, socioeconomic, and contextual factors can profoundly impact parental behaviors and empathy; however, these aspects were not examined thoroughly. Future studies should investigate the intersection of these characteristics with parenting methods and potential variations across different cultural or geographical contexts. This would improve the generalizability of the results and offer more customized recommendations for diverse populations. Ultimately, the study concentrates exclusively on parenting actions and empathy in isolation, disregarding wider family or community factors. The influence of co-parenting dynamics, extended family support, and external pressures, such as work-life balance, was not considered; nonetheless, these elements may considerably affect parenting practices and familial connections. Incorporating these variables in subsequent studies may yield a more comprehensive knowledge of the factors influencing parenting actions and empathy.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the essential function of parental empathy in promoting effective parenting practices and improving family dynamics. The results indicate that parents mostly utilize non-aggressive discipline methods, display elevated affective resonance, and show modest cognitive empathy. These actions collectively foster supportive parent-child connections and enhance emotional resilience in youngsters. Nonetheless, sporadic employment of psychological control and difficulties in cognitive empathy underscore opportunities for enhancement. Interventions aimed at improving parental empathy, emotional intelligence, and communication skills can reduce dependence on manipulative behaviors and enhance emotional bonds. By promoting sympathetic and constructive parenting methods, families can provide caring environments that enhance children's psychological well-being and developmental achievement. Future research must rectify limitations by integrating longitudinal designs and examining the wider sociocultural and environmental elements that affect parental behaviors.

Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with internationally accepted ethical standards for research involving human participants. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to data collection. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and no identifying information was collected.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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