

## Predicting loneliness based on perceived parenting style and self-esteem in adolescents: the moderating role of gender

DOI: [10.22098/JPC.2022.11500.1132](https://doi.org/10.22098/JPC.2022.11500.1132)

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### Abstract

Loneliness is a sad and even painful emotional experience that is thought to be caused by a lack in the quantity or quality of one's social relationships. The present study aimed to predict loneliness based on perceived parenting style and self-esteem in adolescents by moderating the role of gender. The research population included all male and female students of 12-17 years of age studying in the academic year of 1400-1401 in Tehran, and 250 of these students responded to the online questionnaire related to the research. The method of the current research was step-by-step multivariate regression correlation, and to collect data, Asher and Wheeler's loneliness questionnaire (1985), Rosenberg's self-esteem questionnaire (1965), and Bury's parenting questionnaire (1992) were used. The obtained results showed that there is an inverse relationship between permissive and authoritative parenting styles with feelings of loneliness and a direct relationship between authoritarian parenting styles and feelings of loneliness, and no significant relationship was seen between self-esteem and feelings of loneliness. The authoritative parenting style was able to predict the feeling of loneliness in the whole sample and by gender, and the amount of predicting the feeling of loneliness based on the authoritative parenting style was seen more in the group of girls than in boys. According to the findings, It can be concluded that an authoritative parenting style can reduce the feeling of loneliness of teenagers and it is necessary to consider these results in training for parents and clinical counselors.

**Keywords:** Perceived parenting style, loneliness, self-esteem, adolescents, gender



## Introduction

Loneliness is considered a subjective and emotionally unpleasant experience that occurs to people at all stages of development (Sun et al., 2020). Loneliness is a distressing feeling characterized by social isolation, restlessness, unlovability, and general hopelessness, especially during school, whereby a person feels his/her social needs quantitatively and qualitatively in everyday relationships are not resolved (Young, Petersen, and Coulter, 2020; Hawkey and Cacioppo, 2010). Consistent with previous research, feelings of loneliness generally peak around age 13 and then decline throughout adolescence (Geukens et al., 2020). From the point of view of Rogers (1970), loneliness is a painful experience that appears when people feel that they do not have a real relationship with others (Ayhan, Beyazit, 2021), as a result, it depends more on the quality of a parents' relationships than on their quantity (Ars et al., 2021). In this context, the loneliness experienced by the individual is related to negative feelings about social relationships, which is primarily due to the lack of interpersonal interactions and relationships with parents (Heinrich and Gullone, 2006; Junttila and Vauras, 2009). Therefore, children and adolescents who cannot establish open, warm, permanent, and sincere relationships with their parents gradually become lonely (Rohner et al., 2020). Children who do not receive enough acceptance from their experience feelings of anger and pain gradually and become lonely when they isolate themselves from the world to further protect against the trauma of rejection (Rohner et al., 2012). Students have in recent years scored a lower number of measures of well-being and in the general population, mental health difficulties have increased in aged 16–24 across a similar timescale (Brett et al., 2022). Some researchers believe that attachment theory can provide a framework for examining the formation of loneliness in children, although, in Bowlby's theory, attachment and loneliness are not considered related (Berlin, Cassidy, and Belsky, 1995; Ahadi, 2018). Loneliness is associated with many negative outcomes, including academic failure, emotional problems, depression, and sleep quality in adolescents (Qualter et al., 2015; Hawkey, Capitanio, 2015; Qualter et al., 2010; Cole et al., 2021). Previous research into loneliness among students has revealed that loneliness is associated with residence in low or middle-income countries, family wealth, year of the study, gender, mental distress, academic performance, social interactions, and economic support (Zahedi et al. 2022).

Some research has shown that people who experience high levels of loneliness suffer from low self-esteem (Harris et al., 2018), which predicts depression as a result of feelings of vulnerability. (Coticchia and Putnam, 2021). Self-esteem is a vital indicator of the self-perception system that generally refers to a person's positive or negative evaluation of herself /himself (Rosenberg, 1965; Wang, Huebner, and Tian, 2021) and the impact of self-esteem on a variety of health outcomes, including interpersonal relationships, has been demonstrated (Keramer et al, 2022). High self-esteem means a feeling of worth and competence, and low self-esteem means self-rejection, self-deprecation, and self-dissatisfaction. Branden believes that self-esteem consists of two parts; That is, a sense of self-sufficiency and personal worth that ultimately leads to the formation of self-confidence and self-respect (Lewis, 2003; Asgarian and Rezaei, 1400), which can be seen in social relationships. Self-esteem may have less to do with "how much do people

currently love, appreciate, and accept me?" And it's more about, "How well am I generally liked, appreciated, and accepted?" Therefore, it is more about the future time than the present time (Leary, 2021; Baumeister and Robson, 2021). Parents' sensitivity and acceptance towards their child's concerns may improve their self-esteem (Wang et al., 2021) and thus improve the parent-child relationship. Because parent-child cohesion is a vital indicator of the quality of the parent-child relationship (Zhou et al., 2015). It has also been found that having close relationships with parents is related to self-esteem during adolescence (Laursen and Collins, 2009; Mattanah et al., 2011; Birkeland et al., 2013). Some studies have also supported the positive relationship between parent-child cohesion, students' self-esteem, and their academic progress (Ibabe, 2016; Turley, Desmond, and Bruch, 2010). Maccoby and Martin (1983), in their research, showed that teenagers who grew up in families with authoritarian parenting styles were high in self-esteem, social development, and mental health (Abutalebi, 2012).

Studying and examining the family as the first important and influential system in the growth and development of children and adolescents has long been the interest of researchers. Two important dimensions in the way of parent-child interaction were identified by Baumrind between 1990 and 2005, which are Demandingness and responsiveness. Responsiveness of parents means acceptance, care, intimacy, and support, while expectation or demandingness of parents means control of behavior, discipline, and strictness (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Therefore, Baumrind specified the parenting styles: authoritative, autocratic, and permissive. Authoritative parents explain the rules that are expected to be followed in the family and, if necessary, share the rules with their children, give their children independence, and are warm and friendly towards them. Authoritative parents are high in both dimensions of expectation and responsiveness. Authoritarian parents impose strict rules in the family without any explanation, expect their children to strictly obey them, prefer strict discipline and coercion based on punishment, and avoid emotional support and affection for their children. They are high on the expectation dimension and low on the responsiveness dimension. Permissive parents show a more tolerant attitude towards their children, make little demands on them, give their children a lot of freedom, and do not control their behavior. They are low in the expectation dimension and high in the responsiveness dimension. They communicate with their children as little as possible. They are not sufficiently supportive and controlling towards their children (Baumrind, 1991; Darling, 1999; Steinberg, 2019; Asici and Sari, 2021; Dupri Shields, 2007; Soltannejad, Saadipour, and Asadzadeh, 2014). Hence, the children of these parents seem to experience some degree of loneliness. Because one of the important factors that affect the feeling of loneliness and self-esteem of teenagers is parental behavior or parenting styles. Also, parenting styles have a positive and significant relationship with self-confidence in teenagers (Elmasri, Lawend & Elshahat, 2021). Darling and Steinberg (1993) have described perceived parenting styles as the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and expectations of parents regarding the care of their children (Asici and Sari, 2021). Adolescents who define their parents as authority are happier and more satisfied in their lives (Raboteg-

Saric and Sakic, 2014). Also, many studies have shown that adolescents with authoritative parents have more skills, are more emotionally adjusted, are more active in school, and exhibit fewer problematic behaviors (Baumrind et al., 2010; Lee & Gan, 2011; Zhou et al., 2021). For this reason, parents must choose a parenting style that can improve the lives of teenagers in various aspects and create positive behaviors in them (Elmasri et al., 2021).

While some researchers have concluded that the positive benefits of authoritarian parenting affect gender groups, others have found a gender-differentiated effect whereby women and girls are more affected by authoritarian practices (Baumrind, 1971); Steinberg, Ellman, and Mounts, 1989). The research of Zakari and Karimpour (2011), among students, showed that the mean scores of girls in the behavioral strictness-monitoring style are significantly higher than boys, but there is a significant difference between girls and boys in the "acceptance-participation" and "psychological autonomy participation" parenting styles granting was not observed. On the other hand, Lin and Billingham (2014), in their study, reported significant differences in perceived parenting styles between different genders. The maternal and paternal authority was associated with participants' femininity for both parents and was found to be stronger in males than in females. Abu Talebi (2014), in research, examined the relationship between parenting style and self-esteem in the mental health of third-grade high school students in Tehran. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and the authoritative parenting style of parents. Also, a significant relationship was seen between parenting style and students' mental health. Laali Faz and Ali Askari (2007), in their research, predicted the perceived parenting style and demographic variables on the feeling of loneliness of female students. The results showed that support for the authoritarian parenting style has the highest relationship with the criterion variable. Also, two components of the authoritarian parenting style (warmth-supportiveness and autonomy) showed the highest predicting power of loneliness. Previous studies show that children's self-esteem has a positive relationship with permissive parenting styles (Zakari and Karimpour, 2011). However, the results of studies on parental power or control and self-esteem were not consistent. While some studies have shown that parental control has no relationship (Gekas, 1971) or a negative relationship (Grow, 1980) with self-esteem, other studies have shown that parental authority has a positive relationship with self-esteem (Buri et al., 1988). In research, Shirkuvand and Mirhashemi (2019) studied the prediction of bullying based on perceived parenting style with the mediation of self-concept in students. The results of a sample of 290 people showed that perceived parenting has a direct and indirect effect on bullying. Soltannejad, Saadipour, and Asadzadeh (2014), in research, investigated the relationship between perceived parenting styles and procrastination and self-impairment among 150 third-grade high school students. The results showed that the authoritarian parenting style has a positive and significant relationship with procrastination and self-impairment, and authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have a negative and significant relationship with self-impairment.

Parent-child interaction and, in particular, parenting style plays a significant role in the growth and upbringing of children and adolescents. For example, in the field of adaptation

and socialization (Khodabakhsh, Kiani, and Bukani, 2014) or academic progress. Also, research in the field of feeling alone has attracted the attention of researchers in recent years, one of the reasons for which can be the increasing spread of this phenomenon in society, especially during the outbreak of Corona. Therefore, considering the importance of feeling alone during adolescence, which is a period full of tension, it is important to address this issue. In addition, it seems that not all people who feel lonely can reconnect and resolve their loneliness (Qualter et al., 2013) and long-term loneliness has several negative physical and mental health consequences such as depression. Is. Therefore, the long-term experience of loneliness may make people need intervention (Geukens et al., 2020). Therefore, knowing the effective factors in the formation of loneliness in adolescence seems necessary and necessary for timely intervention. Also, in this research, the importance of parenting styles and their dimensions and sub-components (communicative, discipline, autonomy, physical coercion, verbal hostility, punitive, non-explanatory, and neglectful) which was proposed by Robinson, Mandelko, Alsen, and Hart in 2001 Considered. Therefore, the moderating role of gender in predicting the feeling of loneliness based on perceived parenting style and self-esteem in first and second-high school students was tested and investigated. Based on the theoretical findings and research background, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

Perceived parenting style predicts feelings of loneliness.

Self-esteem predicts feelings of loneliness.

Gender plays a moderating role in predicting loneliness based on perceived parenting style.

Gender plays a moderating role in predicting loneliness based on self-esteem.

## **Methods**

The current research method is a correlation type and step-by-step multiple regression model. The statistical population in this research included all boy and girl students 12-17 years old (1st and 2nd high school) studying in the academic year of 2021-2022 in Tehran. To estimate the sample size, the formula proposed by Tabachnik and Fidel was used. Based on the proposed formula, the minimum sample size in correlation studies is calculated from the formula  $8m + 50 \geq N$ . The sample size included 250 students who were selected by the available sampling method and answered the online questionnaire. The criteria for entering the study included volunteering, the age group was 12 to 17 years, and the criteria for leaving the study was not completing the questionnaire completely. Before starting to answer, the subjects were told that their information is completely confidential and that the results will be used only for research purposes, and also refrain from mentioning their names. Finally, after data collection, Pearson's correlation and step-by-step multivariable regression were used for statistical analysis in SPSS version 25.

In this research, the following scales were used to collect data:

Asher and Wheeler (1985) Loneliness Questionnaire: This scale has 24 items and measures two subscales of emotional loneliness and social loneliness. The statements of

this questionnaire are scored on a five-point scale (1: I completely agree, 2: I agree, 3: I have no opinion, 4: I disagree, and 5: I completely disagree) and questions 18, 17, 14, 12, 9, 6, 3 are scored in reverse. In this scale, the number of 9 questions is as irrelevant questions (questions 23, 19, 15, 13, 11, 7, 5, 2) that are related to topics of interest to teenagers and are not considered in the calculation of scale scores are included. Asher and Wheeler (1985) reported the validity of this scale in the form of discriminant validity based on known groups and showed that in terms of divergent and convergent validity, there is a significant correlation between loneliness and good social status (less loneliness with higher social status). They showed that the scale of feelings of loneliness differentiates between rejected children and children of other classes and groups who are neglected, controversial and popular. Asher and Wheeler reported the reliability value by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient equal to 0.90 and using the retest method with a duration of one year equal to 0.55. This questionnaire was translated from English by Azad Farsani et al. (2012). In their research, the validity was confirmed by the opinion of several psychologists and consultants, and the reliability was obtained by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient equal to 0.75.

Rosenberg self-esteem questionnaire: Rosenberg self-esteem scale (1965) was used to evaluate self-esteem. This scale has ten items that measure life satisfaction and feeling good about oneself and the reader must answer each question based on a four-point Likert scale (Questions 1 to 5, completely disagree = zero, disagree = 1, agree = 2, and completely agree to have a score of 3. Also in questions 6 to 10, completely agree = zero, agree = 1, disagree = 2, and completely disagree has a score of 3). 5 of them are presented in a positive form (items number 1 to 5) and 5 other terms are presented in a negative form (items number 6 to 10). The range of scores on this scale is from 10 to 40, and higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. According to Burnett and Wright (2002), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) is one of the most common scales for measuring self-esteem and is considered a valid scale because it has a concept similar to that presented in psychological theories about "self". This questionnaire was created to provide a general picture of positive and negative attitudes about oneself. Wiley (1989), in his review of the research conducted with this scale, found that in seven different studies, the alpha value was obtained from 0.72 to 0.87. Silber and Tippett (1965) obtained a retest coefficient of 0.85 after two weeks.

Buri's Parenting Questionnaire: This questionnaire was created by Buri (1992) to measure three parenting styles, according to Baumrind's theory. It has 30 items on a five-point Likert scale (completely disagree=0, Disagree=1, Almost disagree=2, Agree=3, completely agree=4) every 10 items measuring a parenting style. This tool can be used to understand maternal, paternal, or both parenting styles. An acceptable reliability coefficient was reported by Buri (1991). These coefficients were reported as 0.78 for decisive mothers, 0.86 for authoritarian mothers and 0.81 for permissive mothers and 0.92 for assertive fathers, 0.85 for authoritarian fathers, and 0.77 for permissive fathers.

Similar reliability coefficients were reported by Berzonsky (2004), for example, 0.90 for assertive parents, 0.89 for authoritarian parents, and 0.78 for permissive parents. The coefficients of internal consistency of each dimension of the PAQ by Buri were found to be 0.75 for permissive mothers, 0.85 for authoritarian mothers, 0.82 for assertive mothers, 0.74 for permissive fathers, 0.87 for authoritarian fathers, and 0.85 for assertive fathers.

## Results

141 (56.4%) of the participants were boys and 109 (43.6%) were girls. The average age of the whole sample was 15.26±1.54, the average age of boys was 15.15±1.58, and the average age of girls was 15.35±1.28.

**Table 1** Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between Parenting styles, Self-esteem, and Loneliness

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Permissive parenting	1		.89**	.27**	-.25**
2. Authoritarian parenting	-.56**	1	-.58**	-.11	.25**
3. Authoritative parenting			1	.27**	-.31**
4. Self-esteem				1	-.083
5. Loneliness					1
M	34.48	6.62	34.45	24.91	48.97
SD	3.17	4.41	3.21	2.14	6.916

\* p <.05; \*\* p <.01

The results of Table 1 show that the inverse relationship between Permissive and authoritative parenting styles with loneliness and the direct relationship between authoritarian parenting style and loneliness is significant at the 0.01 level. There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and loneliness.

Variable s	Boys					Girls				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1. Permissive parenting	1	-.483**	.847**	-.002	-.164	1	-.646**	.934**	.449**	-.367**
2. Authoritarian parenting		1	-.508**	-.012	.150		1	-.659**	-.215*	.384**
3. Authoritative parenting			1	-.002	-.229**			1	.444**	-.409**



4. Self-esteem				1	-.036				1	-.231*
5. Loneliness					1					1
M	34.32	6.58	34.32	24.06	47.87	34.32	6.58	34.32	24.06	47.87
SD	3.66	4.69	3.70	2.49	6.92	3.66	4.69	3.70	2.49	6.92

The results of Table 2 show that in two groups of boys and girls, the inverse relationship between Permissive and authoritative parenting styles with feelings of loneliness and the direct relationship between authoritarian parenting styles and feelings of loneliness is significant at the 0.01 level. There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and loneliness.

**Table 3.** The results of regression analysis for predicting feelings of loneliness based on parenting styles and self-esteem

Indicator					Step	group
P	t	$\beta$	SEB	B		
step one						entire sample
0.0001	-5.13	-0.31	0.13	-0.66	Authoritative parenting ( $R^2=0.31, \Delta R^2= 0.09$ )	
step one						Boys
0.006	-2.77	-0.23	0.20	-0.56	Authoritative parenting ( $R^2=0.23, \Delta R^2= 0.05$ )	
step one						girls
0.0001	-4.63	-0.40	0.16	-0.76	Authoritative parenting ( $R^2=0.40, \Delta R^2= 0.16$ )	

The step-by-step regression results in Table 3 show that among the predictor variables (self-esteem, authoritarian, facilitative, and authoritarian parenting styles), only the authoritarian parenting style can reduce the feeling of loneliness in the entire sample and also by gender. to predict the amount of predicting loneliness based on authoritative parenting style is higher in girls than in boys.

## Discussion

In the current study, "prediction of loneliness based on perceived parenting style and self-esteem in adolescents: the moderating role of gender" was investigated. The results showed that loneliness can be predicted based on the perceived parenting style and self-esteem of teenagers of both sexes. There was an inverse relationship between permissive and authoritative parenting styles with feelings of loneliness and a direct relationship between authoritarian parenting styles and feelings of loneliness. In both groups of boys

and girls, there was an inverse relationship between permissive and authoritative parenting styles and feelings of loneliness, and a direct relationship between authoritarian parenting styles and feelings of loneliness and authoritative parenting style could predict loneliness in the whole sample as well as by gender. This means that the authoritarian parenting style increases loneliness in teenagers and as a result, their distance and isolation from the family center, which can have consequences, and on the contrary, the permissive and authoritarian parenting style of parents does not cause the feeling of loneliness in teenagers. The results of this finding are consistent with the research of Wang et al. (2021), Asici and Sari (2021), Zhou et al. (2021), Steinberg (2019), Zhou et al. Zakari and Karimpour (2011), Ahadi (2017), Bamrind (1991), Bamrind (1971), Buri et al. (1988), Khoinejad et al. et al.

Many researchers, including (Mehrandish et al., 2018) indicate that teenagers suffer more from feelings of loneliness in the family environment, such as being rejected, not being heard, and being blamed. According to Shulin et al. (2015), the best model that can predict teenagers' feelings of loneliness is family and social relationships. Also, the research of Kalantari and Hosseinizadeh Arani (2014) shows that the factor of family relationships has the greatest impact on the feeling of loneliness. Therefore, we can understand the effective role of the family in the life of teenagers. Also, according to the findings of the research, it is possible to understand the ineffective parenting styles of the parents of these teenagers because it causes them to feel lonely. In addition, the research of Qamari Kivi et al. (2013), Khoinejad et al. (2016), and Laali Faz and Askari (2017) shows that parents with autocratic and permissive parenting styles do not have clear and clear regulations, for punishment and They use blame or are inattentive or do not have the sensitivity and responsiveness of authoritative parents, so they have teenagers who feel more lonely.

The research results of Zhang et al. (2015), Sheikhol-Eslami, and Kazemnejad (2014) show that a decrease in self-esteem in teenagers increases the feeling of loneliness in them because the low level of self-esteem causes isolation and avoidance of communication. The results of the present study show that there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and loneliness. Therefore, the common variance between the two variables is small and random and is in line with the results of Baumrind's (1972) and Buri's (1991) research. In explaining this finding, it can be said that permissive parents allow their children to make their own decisions at any age and do whatever they want whenever they want. The findings of the current research also state that the permissive parenting style of parents when they leave them to themselves, causes problems in the growth process of children, and as a result, chaos and disorder are formed in the family atmosphere. But in families with an authoritative parenting style, there is a friendly relationship among family members, and good listening and attention can build self-esteem among each family member. In such families, due to the richness of the family atmosphere and the provision of acceptance for each family member, we can witness a

sense of self-worth and high self-esteem among the children. Disland (2000) showed that children with authoritative parents have higher levels of autonomy than children with authoritarian and permissive parents (Khoinejad et al., 2016). On the other hand, parents' autocratic parenting style reduces their self-esteem and increases their feeling of loneliness. It seems that parents with this parenting style talk less with their children or even resort to punishment and pressure. Therefore, children in such families are often anxious, withdrawn, and lonely (Abutalebi Ahmadi, 2012). Authoritarian parents have very high expectations from their children, and one of the characteristics of children with authoritarian parents is their low self-esteem (Soltan Nejad et al., 2014). In general, parents with an authoritarian style are high in the control dimension and low in the affection dimension, which is theoretically consistent with Bowlby's theory (1977) about the effect of attachment on self-worth in adulthood.

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## Conclusion

These results show that the use of punishment, coercion, blame, and humiliation by parents with an authoritarian parenting style ultimately leads to unpleasant feelings in their children, and as a result, consequences such as emotional gaps, loneliness, low self-esteem, relationships Outside the social framework, he has mental illnesses. The results of the current research show that although the permissive parenting style is related to the feeling of loneliness among teenagers, the extent of its harm to teenagers is less than the authoritarian style. In this context, it can be said that permissive parents avoid punishing and blaming their children and only show less attention to them, and probably this neglect has a less destructive effect on their relationship. According to what was said, the present research shows that the first place and the most effective place in the process of personality development and mental health of people in the family. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of the parenting and communication styles of parents and children and to provide love and warmth in the family environment for the all-around development of children.

Regarding the limitations of the research, it is possible to point out the level of honesty of the participants in answering the self-report questionnaires, which may have affected the results of the research. The results of this research can be used in family counseling sessions and life skills training and increasing parents' communication literacy. It is suggested that an authoritative parenting style be taught to parents practically and practically in family education topics. Considering that the parenting style of the parents was examined from the children's point of view in the present study, it is therefore suggested that in addition to the children's perception, the parent's perception of their parenting methods should also be examined in future research. Since meta-analytical studies by integrating the results of different studies increase the power of the study to find meaningful results and on the other hand, qualitative studies can provide researchers with a deeper description and analysis of the subject under study, it is suggested.

Considering the importance of the research topic, the implementation of such studies should be considered by interested researchers.

### Disclosure Statements

In the end, we are grateful to all the participants in the research, whose cooperation made this research possible. The authors of this study declare that they are not sponsored by any organization. In addition, there is no conflict of interest in this study.

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