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# Perceived parenting styles, depersonalisation, anxiety and coping behaviour in adolescents

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## Abstract

The present study investigated the relationship between perceived parenting styles, depersonalisation, anxiety and coping behaviour in a normal high school student sample ( $N=276$ ). It was found that perceived parental psychological pressure correlated positively with depersonalisation and trait anxiety among the adolescents. Perceived parental warmth was positively associated with active coping and negatively correlated with trait anxiety in the adolescents. A cluster analysis revealed four types of parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and indifferent. The group with the authoritarian parenting style showed higher scores on depersonalisation and anxiety. The groups with the authoritative and permissive style of both parents showed the highest score on active problem coping. The discussion focuses on the role of parenting styles in dysfunctional personality traits during adolescence. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Perceived parenting styles; Depersonalisation; Anxiety; Coping

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## 1. Introduction

Several recent studies have indicated that there is a relationship between various forms of psychopathology during childhood and adolescence and perceived parenting style, that is the child's perceptions of their parent's behaviour. Parenting style is usually conceptualised along two dimensions: parental demand (e.g. control) and parental response (e.g. warmth). Four parenting styles can be distinguished: authoritative (high demand and high responsiveness), authoritarian (high demand and low responsiveness), permissive (low demand and high responsiveness) and

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indifferent or neglectful (low demand and low responsiveness) (Baumrind, 1971; see also Paulson & Sputa, 1996). According to Darling and Steinberg (1993) parenting styles must be distinguished from parenting practices—behaviours defined by specific content and socialisation goals (e.g. school achievement). Parenting styles can be understood as attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and create an emotional climate in which parents' behaviour is expressed. Darling and Steinberg proposed a model in which parenting style is a contextual variable that moderates the relationship between specific parenting practices and specific child outcomes.

Several studies emphasise the importance of perceived parenting styles as risk factors for individual development during adolescence (see Perris, Arindell, & Eisemann, 1994, for a review). In this context, individual differences such as coping strategies, anxiety and psychopathological factors seem to play an important role (Endler & Parker, 1994; Hoffman, Levy-Shiff, Sohlberg, & Zarizki, 1992).

Many theoretical approaches divide coping efforts into two groups: those intended to act on the stressor (active or problem-focused coping) and those intended to regulate emotional states resulting from the stressful event (passive or emotion-focused coping; Compas, 1987). Previous research has concluded that problem-focused coping is associated with more adaptive functioning and that emotion-focused coping, reflective of emotional dysregulation is associated with greater affective, behavioural, and social dysfunction (Hoffman et al., 1992; Windle & Windle, 1996).

The results of research investigating perceived parenting styles and adolescent maladjustment are very heterogeneous. In a longitudinal study with a large adolescent sample, Shucksmith, Hendry, and Glendinning (1995) found that permissive parenting style was predominant, and that the most effective style (based on measures of school integration and mental well-being) was the authoritative style. Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) also reported that adolescents with authoritative parents were better adjusted (in terms of less school misconduct, drug use and delinquency) and more competent (areas of achievement) than adolescents with neglectful or indulgent parents. Johnson, Shulman, and Collins (1991) found that parental warmth was positively related to optimal psychological adjustment, and also found that rejecting discipline (e.g. control, punishment) was related to poorer psychological adjustment. Wagner, Cohen, and Brook (1996) also found that adolescents who reported warm parenting by both mother and father were less likely to suffer symptoms of depression in reaction to stressful events than were adolescents who reported harsher discipline by both parents.

These results suggest that a positive relationship with parents provides a form of social support, which enhances psychological resources (e.g. self-esteem) and therefore enables adolescents to cope with stressful events (Cohen & Wills 1985; Baumrind, 1991). In a study of high school students, Dusek and Danko (1994) found that students with authoritarian parents reported less frequent use of active coping behaviour than did students with highly permissive or authoritative parents. The results of the described studies showed that perceived authoritarian and controlling parenting styles are closely related to psychological disturbance in adolescence. A smaller number of studies have investigated the role of perceived parenting styles in the development of anxiety (e.g. Gerlsma, Emmelkamp, & Arrindell, 1990; Furukawa, 1992; Muris & Merckelbach, 1998), suggesting that parental rejection and control are closely associated with anxiety in childhood. These studies suggest that the parenting styles perceived by the adolescents have a substantial impact on their level of psychopathology.

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