

IMPACT OF PARENTING STYLES ON MACHIAVELLIANISM AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the impact of parenting styles on Machiavellianism and emotional regulation. The sample size of this quantitative study was consisting of two hundred and fifty (250) participants, Data was collected through purposive sample technique from different public universities of Karachi (University of Karachi & Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology). Parenting style were assessed by Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991), Machiavellianism was assessed by Five Factor Machiavellianism Inventory (Collison, Vize, Miller & Lynam; 2022) and Emotional regulation was assessed by Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross, J.J., & John, O.P., 2003). Findings revealed that Authoritarian father were significantly correlated with Machiavellianism; Antagonism ($r=.283$, $p<0.01$), planfulness ($r=.177$, $p<0.01$) and agency ($r=.177$, $p<0.01$) and authoritarian mothers positively correlate with antagonism ($r=.248$, $p<0.01$), planfulness ($r=.198$, $p<0.01$) and agency ($r=.203$, $p<0.01$). Authoritative mother was significantly correlated with Machiavellianism; antagonism ($r=.128$, $p<0.05$) and agency ($r=.193$, $p<0.05$) and authoritative father was positive correlated with agency ($r=.157$, $p<0.05$). Authoritative mother was significantly correlated ($r=.194$, $p<0.01$) with cognitive reappraisal. Moreover, findings revealed that parenting styles did not predict Machiavellianism and emotional regulation among university students. This study will contribute to the development of effective strategies and techniques in educational settings and in clinical settings. This study will contribute in spreading awareness about the crucial role of parents in the emotional and psychological development of their children.

Keywords: Parenting Style, Machiavellianism, Emotional Regulation.

INTRODUCTION

The way parents raise their children, how they discipline, communicate, and guide them, plays a powerful role in shaping who those children become. Parenting styles aren't just about rules or affection; they influence a child's emotional well-being, social confidence, and even how they think

(Ashraf et al., 2019). One of the most influential voices in this area is Baumrind (1966), who identified different parenting styles based on how responsive and demanding parents are. For instance, permissive parents are warm and lenient, letting children make many of their own decisions.

Authoritarian parents, on the other hand, expect strict obedience and rarely explain their rules.

Research shows these parenting choices can deeply impact children well into adulthood. For example, children raised by authoritarian fathers—especially daughters—often show more signs of codependency than those raised by permissive ones (Gottuso, 2021). Similarly, fathers who are emotionally distant or controlling tend to influence their children's emotional struggles more than mothers do (Ralston, 2014). Warm, supportive parenting helps children manage their emotions better, while permissive or neglectful parenting can make this harder (Jabeen et al., 2013). Emotional regulation is essentially how we manage our feelings—knowing when to express them, when to hold back, and how to stay balanced in tough moments (Gross, 2008; Aldao, 2013). Two common ways people regulate emotions are **cognitive reappraisal** (reframing a situation to feel differently about it) and **expressive suppression** (holding back outward signs of emotion). The former is generally healthy; the latter can build stress over time (Mouatsou & Koutra, 2023).

Machiavellianism, a trait named after the political thinker Machiavelli, describes individuals who are emotionally cold, manipulative, and focused on personal gain. These individuals often view others cynically and value results over ethics (Christie & Geis, 1970; Chung, 2017). Interestingly, they may be good at understanding emotions but use that insight to manipulate rather than connect (Massey & Craven, 2016). It's not just personality—childhood experiences often lie at the root.

Research shows that how someone was raised can influence whether they develop Machiavellian traits later in life. Children who grow up with warm, supportive parenting are generally less likely to become manipulative or distrustful adults. On the other hand, kids who experience rejection, coldness, or neglect—especially from their mothers—may develop a negative view of others and feel that emotional closeness is unsafe (Lang & Birkas, 2015; Lyon et al., 2020). For women in particular, the absence of warmth from either parent can lead to higher levels of emotional manipulation and distrust (Zulfiqar, Shabbir, & Ishfaq, 2020; Coelho et al., 2024).

Both overly controlling and overly neglectful parenting can contribute to darker personality traits. When parents fail to grant autonomy or are emotionally distant, children may develop coping

mechanisms like manipulation, avoidance, or emotional suppression (Lang & Lenard, 2015; Blanchard et al., 2016). These traits don't appear in a vacuum—they're often a child's response to unmet emotional needs.

There's also a link between Machiavellian traits and how people manage emotions. Many studies show that people high in Machiavellianism struggle with healthy emotional regulation. They may either suppress their feelings or lack empathy altogether (Austin et al., 2007; Szijarto & Bereczkei, 2014). However, some research has found more nuance—for instance, individuals with Machiavellian traits might still be good at reframing emotional situations but do so for personal advantage (Fatima & Shahid, 2020; Deak et al., 2017).

The way parents approach discipline and emotional connection makes a difference. Authoritative parenting marked by warmth and structure is linked with better emotional skills, stronger academic performance, and fewer behavioral problems (Newman et al., 2015; Zulfiqar, Ishfaq & Pervez, 2021). In contrast, authoritarian parenting is often associated with emotional difficulties, behavioral issues, and even aggression (Haslam et al., 2020). Children thrive when they feel loved, understood, and supported. Parenting marked by strictness, neglect, or emotional coldness often leads to the opposite outcome (Agbaria et al., 2021).

METHOD

Quantitative research method was used. Data was collected by convenience sampling by different government and private universities of Karachi. The target population for this study were male and female students (age= 18-30). The participants of the study were (N=250) male and females from the different private and government universities of Karachi. Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri 1991) was used to measure parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian and permissive). The questionnaire consists of 30 items for both parents and each type contains 10 items, scores for both father and mother based on how their son and daughters perceive them as a parent. It's a 5-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. the total reliability of the scale 0.89 as reported by Bury (1991), 0.78 for mothers' authoritativeness, 0.81 for mother's authoritarianism, 0.81 for mother's permissiveness, 0.92 for father's authoritativeness,

0.85 for father's authoritarianism and 0.78 for father's permissiveness as reported by Buri (1991).

Five Factor Machiavellianism Inventory (Collison, Vise, Miller & Lyman; 2022): The five factor Machiavellianism inventory consists of 52 items and is based on a 5-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. FFMI subscales are loaded into three components: 1) Agency which includes Achievement, Activity, Assertiveness, Competence, Invulnerability and Self-confidence; 2) Antagonism which includes Selfishness, Immodesty, Manipulativeness, Callousness and Cynicism and 3) Playfulness which includes Deliberation and Order. Cronbach's alpha for all subscales ranged from .68 to .82 in the derivation sample and .60 to .80 in the validation sample.

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross, J.J., & John, O.P., 2003): Emotion regulation of (Gross, J.J., & John, O.P., 2003) was used. ERQ is

a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). ERQ is a 10 item self-report scale which measures the tendency of participants' regulation of emotion in two ways (1) is Cognitive Reappraisal and (2) is Expressive Suppression. The Cronbach's alpha for cognitive reappraisal was .79 and for expression suppression was .73.

All scales were on open access. To fulfill the requirements of this study the permission letters signed by the supervisor were submitted to different universities of Karachi. Data collection was begun at different assigned dates by the authority figures of the universities. The sample of 250 including females and males filled the form from different government, private and semi-private universities of Karachi. The age range of the participants were 18-30. The informed consent was signed first assuring the confidentiality of the participant. The consent was followed by Demographic information and the remaining three questionnaires.

RESULTS

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE AND ALPHA COEFFICIENTS FOR ALL STUDY VARIABLES (N=250)

Scales	k	M	SD	A	Range		Skew	Kurt
					Potential	Actual		
Parenting Style scale (Father)	30	95.68	13.59	.781	30-150	52-134	-.303	.760
Parenting Style scale (Mother)	30	97.07	14.17	.808	30-150	45-137	-.570	1.363
Five Factor Machiavellianism Inventory	52	166.84	17.58	.792	52-260	93-224	.301	3.056
Emotional Regulation Questionnaire	10	47.87	8.562	.714	10-70	13-68	-.207	.927

Note: Skew = Skewness; Kurt = Kurtosis; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; k = Number of items.

Table 1 represents the psychometric properties of the scale used for all study variables. Findings indicate that all variables are well suited to use in the main study. the psychometric properties of scale like reliability fall within acceptable range. it means that the scale produces significant results,

Moreover the actual scores fall in the range of potential range. Additionally the values of skewness and kurtosis fall between the range of -1 to +1 which is considered acceptable and it means the data has a normal distribution shape.

TABLE 2: CORRELATION BETWEEN AUTHORITARIAN, PERMISSIVE AND AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING STYLES AND MACHIAVELLIANISM (N=250)

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 control father	250	30.196	6.049	—				
2 control mother	250	30.780	6.423	0.725**	—			
3 Antagonism	250	63.152	7.931	0.283**	0.248**	—		
4 Planfullness	250	25.888	3.801	0.177**	0.198**	0.528**	—	
5 Agency	250	77.726	8.856	0.177**	0.203**	0.634**	0.502**	—
1 Permissive father	250	31.840	5.772	—				
2 Permissive mother	250	31.864	5.898	0.723**	—			

3 Antagonism	250	63.152	7.931	0.018	0.061	—	
4 Planfulness	250	25.888	3.801	-0.006	-0.007	0.528**	—
5 Agency	250	77.726	8.856	0.025	0.106	0.634**	0.502** —
1 Authoritative Father	250	33.644	6.776	—			
2 Authoritative mother	250	34.353	6.364	0.709**	—		
3 Antagonism	250	63.152	7.931	0.055	0.128**	—	
4 Planfulness	250	25.888	3,801	-0.409	0.010	0.528**	—
5 Agency	250	77.726	8.856	0.157**	0.193*	0.634**	0.502** —
1 Authoritative father	250	33.644	6.776	—			
2 Authoritative mother	250	34.353	6.364	0.709**	—		
3 Antagonism	250	63.152	7.931	0.055	0.128**	—	
4 Planfulness	250	25.888	3,801	-0.409	0.010	0.528**	—
5 Agency	250	77.726	8.856	0.157**	0.193*	0.634**	0.502** —

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

TABLE 2 SHOWS CORRELATION BETWEEN AUTHORITARIAN, PERMISSIVE AND AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING STYLES AND MACHIAVELLIANISM.

TABLE 3: CORRELATION BETWEEN AUTHORITARIAN, PERMISSIVE AND AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING STYLES AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1 Control father	250	30.196	6.049	—			
2 Control mother	250	30.780	6.423	0.725**	—		
3 Emotional cognitive reappraisal	250	29.004	5.717	0.007	-0.002	—	
4 Emotional expressive suppression	250	18.864	4.334	0.003	0.004	0.441**	—
1 Permissive father	250	31.840	5.772	—			
2 Permissive mother	250	31.864	5.898	0.723**	—		
3 Emotional cognitive reappraisal	250	29.004	5.717	0.104	0.056	—	
4 Emotional expressive suppression	250	18.864	4.334	-0.035	0.035	0.441**	—
1 Authoritative father	250	33.644	6.776	—			
2 Authoritative mother	250	34.353	6.364	0.709**	—		
3 Emotional cognitive reappraisal	250	29.004	5.717	0.123	0.194**	—	
4 Emotional expressive suppression	250	18.864	4.334	-0.062	0.060	0.441**	—

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

Table 3 shows Correlation between Authoritarian, Permissive and Authoritative parenting styles and emotional regulation

Table 4: Correlation among Machiavellianism and emotional regulation (N=250)

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Antagonism	250	63.152	7.931	—				
2 Playfulness	250	25.888	3.801	0.528**	—			
3 Agency	250	77.726	8.856	0.634**	0.502**	—		
4 Emotional cognitive reappraisal	250	29.004	5.717	0.043	-0.059	0.102	—	
5 Emotional expressive suppression	250	18.864	4.334	0.085	0.032	0.083	0.441**	—

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

Table 4 describes the Correlation between Machiavellianism (antagonism, agency and playfulness). Findings indicate that there is no significant relation among Machiavellianism and emotional regulation ($p > 0.01$).

Table 5: Regression Coefficient of Parenting Styles on Machiavellianism (N=250)

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CL
Constant	138.887	8.168	17.004	0.000	[122.79, 154.97]
Authoritarian father	0.435	0.263	1.654	0.100	[-0.08, 0.95]
Authoritarian mother	0.384	0.252	1.525	0.129	[-0.11, 0.88]
Permissive father	-0.361	0.315	-1.148	0.252	[-0.98, 0.25]
Permissive mother	-0.093	0.315	-0.295	0.768	[-0.71, 0.52]
Authoritative father	0.008	0.264	0.029	0.977	[-0.51, 0.52]
Authoritative mother	0.502	0.281	1.785	0.076	[-0.05, 1.05]

$R^2 = .098$, $F = 4.380$, $P < 0.01$

Note = Unstandardized Beta; SE= Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval

Table 5 shows the impact of parenting style on Machiavellianism. The R^2 value was 0.098 which means that parenting style explains 9.8% variance in Machiavellianism which is statistically significant $p < 0.01$ but the individual influence of parenting styles are not statistically significant. Findings revealed that authoritative father ($B = .435$, $p = .100$) and mother ($B = .384$, $P = .129$) has a positive but non-significant impact on

Machiavellianism while permissive father ($B = -.361$, $p = .252$) and mother ($B = -.093$, $p = .252$) has slightly negative but non-significant impact on Machiavellianism. However authoritative father has positive but non-significant ($B = .008$, $p = .97$) impact on Machiavellianism but the authoritative mother has a positive and marginally significant ($B = .502$, $p = .076$) impact on Machiavellianism.

Table 6: Regression Coefficient of Parenting Styles on Emotional Regulation (Cognitive Reappraisal) (N=250)

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CL
Constant	23.792	2.713	8.769	0.000	[18.44, 29.13]
Authoritarian father	-0.001	0.087	-0.008	0.994	[-0.17, 0.17]
Authoritarian mother	-0.019	0.083	-0.227	0.821	[-0.18, 0.14]
Permissive father	0.155	0.105	1.481	0.140	[-0.05, 0.36]
Permissive mother	-0.186	0.105	-1.781	0.076	[-0.39, 0.02]
Authoritative father	-0.079	0.087	-0.910	0.364	[-0.24, 0.09]
Authoritative mother	0.275	0.094	2.937	0.004	[0.09, 0.46]

$R^2 = .053$, $F = 2.251$, $P < 0.01$

Note = Unstandardized Beta; SE= Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval

Table 6 shows the impact of parenting styles on cognitive reappraisal, one of the strategies of emotional regulation. The R^2 value was .053 which means that parenting styles explain 5.3% variance in cognitive reappraisal which is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). findings revealed that

Authoritative mother has a positive and significant ($B = .275$, $p = .004$) impact on cognitive reappraisal and Permissive mother has negative and marginally significant ($B = -.186$, $p = .076$) .364) have non-significant impact on cognitive reappraisal.

Table 7: Regression Coefficient of Parenting Styles on Emotional Regulation (Expressive Suppression)

(N=250).

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CL
Constant	18.666	2.079	8.977	0.000	[14.57 , 22.76]
Authoritarian father	-0.049	0.067	-0.740	0.460	[-0.18 , 0.08]
Authoritarian mother	0.062	0.064	0.974	0.331	[-0.06, 0.18]
Permissive father	-0.024	0.080	-0.301	0.763	[-0.18, 0.13]
Permissive mother	-0.002	0.080	-0.030	0.976	[-0.16, 0.15]
Authoritative father	-0.129	0.066	-1.950	0.052	[-0.26, 0.00]
Authoritative mother	0.145	0.072	2.023	0.044	[0.00, 0.28]

$R^2=.031$, $F = 1.282$, $P > 0.01$

Note = Unstandardized Beta; SE= Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval

Table 7 shows the impact of parenting styles on Expressive suppression, one of the strategies of emotional regulation. The R^2 value was .031 which means that parenting styles explain 3.1% variance in Expressive suppression which is statistically non-significant ($p > 0.01$). Collectively parenting styles do not predict the outcome variable effectively but individually parenting styles predict outcome effectively. Authoritative mother shows a significant positive ($B = .145$, $p = .044$) impact on expressive suppression while Authoritative father shows marginally significant negative ($B = -.129$, $p = .052$) impact on expressive suppression. However, authoritarian fathers ($B = -.049$, $p = .460$) mother ($B = .062$, $p = .331$) and permissive fathers ($B = -.024$, $p = .763$) mother ($B = -.002$, $p = .976$) have no significant impact on expressive suppression.

Discussions

This study explored how different parenting styles shape young adults' personalities—specifically looking at Machiavellian traits (like manipulation and emotional coldness) and emotional regulation (how people handle their feelings).

One of the clearest findings was that authoritarian parenting—the kind that's strict, controlling, and emotionally distant—was linked to higher levels of Machiavellianism (Ghorbani & Aghaei, 2018; Rangel et al., 2016). In particular, the lack of warmth from fathers seemed to play a stronger role in this association (Jonason et al., 2014). Children raised without emotional support may learn to distrust others and rely more on manipulation and self-preservation (Wang & Keefe, 2009). In contrast, permissive parenting—which is warm but lacks boundaries—didn't show a strong link with Machiavellian traits (Megdadi et al., 2020). This may be because children still feel emotionally supported, even if structure is weak (Kochanska et al., 2008). Similarly, authoritative parenting

showed mixed results; while generally beneficial, some children might still use manipulative behaviors to reach goals (Sullivan et al., 2019), although the warmth and responsiveness usually lead to healthier emotional outcomes (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Chao, 1994).

Interestingly, there was no strong link between authoritarian parenting and emotional regulation. Although these parents are often rigid and critical, that didn't directly predict whether their children struggled to manage emotions (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). It's possible other factors—like temperament, culture, or peer influence—are more relevant here (Rothbart & Bates, 2006). One consistent pattern was that authoritative mothers (those who are warm and supportive but still provide structure) were positively linked with cognitive reappraisal, a healthy way of managing difficult emotions (Gilliom et al., 2002; Lamb et al., 2010). Mothers tend to initiate more emotional discussions with their children than fathers, which might explain the difference.

Finally, the results showed no significant link between Machiavellian traits and emotional regulation. Although these individuals may appear emotionally detached, they often use emotional strategies intentionally—sometimes even skillfully—to control situations (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Koh & Watanabe, 2020). Some studies suggest that while they may suppress emotion, they are not necessarily dysregulated—they may just engage differently (Côté et al., 2011; Zhao & Liu, 2016).

Conclusion

The findings suggest that how parents relate to their children—whether through control, warmth, neglect, or balance—can influence the development of Machiavellian personality traits. In particular, cold and authoritarian parenting, especially from

fathers, seems to encourage emotional detachment and manipulation (Jonason et al., 2014; Wang & Keefe, 2009). However, parenting style on its own wasn't enough to explain emotional regulation differences, pointing to the role of other personal and social influences (Miller et al., 2019).

Implications of the study

These insights are important for families, educators, and therapists. Parents need to understand that both warmth and structure are essential. When emotional needs aren't met—especially during key developmental years—it can shape personality and behavior in lasting ways (Kochanska et al., 2008; Graham et al., 2018). For professionals, exploring the emotional history behind traits like manipulation or detachment could lead to more compassionate, targeted interventions.

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