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## Happy Beginnings: Exploring the Role of Parenting Styles in Preschool Children's Well-Being

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### ABSTRACT

Early childhood is a crucial period that lays the foundation for emotional, social, and psychological development. Parenting style plays a vital role in shaping children's happiness, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. The present study aimed to examine the influence of parenting styles on happiness and well-being among preschool children. A descriptive and correlational research design was adopted. The sample consisted of 100 preschool children aged 3–6 years selected using random sampling technique from urban preschools. Parenting styles were assessed using a standardized Parenting Style Questionnaire based on Baumrind's classification. Children's happiness was assessed using the Subjective Happiness Scale, and well-being was measured using a standardized Well-being Scale. Socioeconomic status was assessed using the Agarwal Socioeconomic Status Scale. The findings revealed that 46% of parents followed authoritative parenting, followed by authoritarian (24%), permissive (18%), and neglectful (12%) styles. About 62% of children exhibited high well-being, and 58% showed high happiness levels. Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between authoritative parenting and children's happiness ( $r = 0.68$ ) and well-being ( $r = 0.72$ ). Authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles showed significant negative relationships. Regression analysis showed that



parenting style and socioeconomic status together explained 58% of the variance in well-being. The study concludes that authoritative parenting plays a crucial role in promoting happiness and emotional well-being in preschool children. The findings highlight the need for parental awareness and guidance programs to enhance positive parenting practices.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Early childhood is considered the most formative period of human development. During this stage, children acquire emotional stability, social competence, self-regulation skills, and behavioral patterns that influence their later life. The family, particularly parents, plays a crucial role in shaping these aspects of development. Parenting style refers to the overall emotional climate and behavioral approach adopted by parents while raising their children. Baumrind classified parenting styles into four categories: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. Among these, authoritative parenting is considered the most effective as it balances warmth and discipline.

Happiness in children is reflected through positive emotions, satisfaction, and joyful engagement with surroundings. Well-being includes emotional, psychological, and social functioning. Children with higher well-being show better academic performance, healthier relationships, and fewer emotional problems.

Socioeconomic status also significantly influences parenting behavior and child development. Families with better educational and economic resources can provide enriched environments that support healthy development.

Despite increasing awareness, limited studies in the Indian context have explored the combined influence of parenting styles and socioeconomic status on children's happiness and well-being. Hence, the present study was undertaken to examine this relationship in preschool children.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To assess the parenting styles practiced by parents of preschool children.
2. To assess the level of happiness and well-being among preschool children
3. To examine the relationship between parenting styles and happiness and well-being.
4. To study the influence of parenting style and socioeconomic status on children's well-being.



## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The present study adopted a **descriptive and correlational research design** to examine the relationship between parenting styles and their influence on happiness and well-being among preschool children. This design was considered appropriate as it helps in describing existing conditions and determining the degree of association between variables without manipulating them.

The study aimed to understand how different parenting styles affect the emotional and psychological development of preschool children, particularly in terms of happiness and well-being.

### Variables of the Study

#### 1. Independent Variable

- Parenting Styles
- Authoritative
- Authoritarian
- Permissive
- Neglectful

#### 2. Dependent Variables

- Happiness of preschool children
- Well-being of preschool children

#### 3. Control Variables

- Age of the child
- Gender
- Socioeconomic status
- Type of family

**Area of the Study:** The study was conducted in selected **urban preschools**. Urban settings were chosen as they provide diverse parenting practices, educational exposure, and socioeconomic backgrounds, making the study more comprehensive and representative.

### Sample Selection



## Population

The population consisted of **preschool children aged 3–6 years** and their parents.

## Sample Size

A total of **100 preschool children** along with their parents were selected for the study.

## Sampling Technique

The sample was selected using **random sampling technique**, ensuring equal chance of participation for all eligible respondents.

## Criteria for Selection of Sample

### Inclusion Criteria

- Children aged **3 to 6 years**
- Children attending preschool
- Parents willing to provide information
- Children living with parents

### Exclusion Criteria

- Children with physical or mental disabilities
- Children not residing with parents
- Parents unwilling to participate

## Tools Used for Data Collection

The following standardized tools were used to collect data for the present study:

### 1. Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ)

#### Description

The Parenting Style Questionnaire is a standardized tool based on **Baumrind's classification of parenting styles**. It assesses parental behavior and attitudes towards child-rearing.

#### Dimensions Assessed

1. **Authoritative Parenting** – warmth, support, and reasonable control
2. **Authoritarian Parenting** – strict discipline, low emotional warmth
3. **Permissive Parenting** – high warmth with little control
4. **Neglectful Parenting** – low involvement and low responsiveness

**Scoring and Range**

- The questionnaire consists of **40 items**
- Each item is rated on a **5-point Likert scale**
  - Strongly Agree – 5
  - Agree – 4
  - Neutral – 3
  - Disagree – 2
  - Strongly Disagree – 1

**Score Range**

Parenting Style	Score Range	Interpretation
<b>Authoritative</b>	20–50	Higher score = More authoritative
<b>Authoritarian</b>	20–50	Higher score = More controlling
<b>Permissive</b>	20–50	Higher score = More permissive
<b>Neglectful</b>	20–50	Higher score = More neglectful

**Interpretation**

- Higher score in **authoritative** dimension indicates positive parenting
- Higher scores in **authoritarian or neglectful** dimensions indicate negative parenting practices

**2. Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)****Description**

The Subjective Happiness Scale measures the overall happiness level of the child as perceived by parents. It assesses emotional positivity, life satisfaction, and general happiness.

**Scoring and Range**

- Contains **4–10 items**
- Rated on a **7-point Likert scale**
- Score range: **20–100**

Score Range	Level of Happiness
Below 50	Low happiness
51–70	Moderate happiness
Above 70	High happiness



### Interpretation

Higher scores indicate greater happiness and emotional well-being.

### 3. Well-Being Scale

#### Description

The Well-Being Scale measures the overall psychological and emotional health of children. It assesses:

- Emotional stability
- Social adjustment
- Self-confidence
- Positive behavior

#### Scoring and Range

- Consists of **30 items**
- 5-point rating scale
- Score range: **30–150**

Score Range	Level of Well-being
30–70	Low well-being
71–110	Moderate well-being
111–150	High well-being

Higher scores indicate better emotional and psychological well-being.

### 4. Agarwal Socioeconomic Status Scale

#### Description

The Agarwal Socioeconomic Status Scale is a standardized tool widely used in Indian studies to assess family socioeconomic status.

#### Areas Covered

- Education of parents
- Occupation
- Monthly income
- Family possessions

#### Score Range and Classification

Score	Socioeconomic Status
Below 10	Low SES
11–20	Middle SES
Above 20	High SES



### Interpretation

Higher scores indicate better socioeconomic status, which is associated with better living conditions, educational opportunities, and child development outcome

### Results :

Table 1 provides the demographic characteristics of the preschool children included in the study. The distribution helps situate the findings in context:

- **Age:** 60% of children were 5–6 years old, indicating a slightly older preschool representation.
- **Gender:** The sample was balanced (52% male, 48% female), avoiding gender bias.
- **Family Type:** 62% lived in nuclear families, typical of urban settings where nuclear structures are increasingly common.
- **Birth Order:** Firstborns made up 46% of the sample, which may influence parental attention and parenting styles.
- **Socioeconomic Status:** Middle SES was predominant (50%), suggesting that most children came from households with moderate educational and financial resources.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	3–4 years	40	40%
	5–6 years	60	60%
Gender	Male	52	52%
	Female	48	48%
Family Type	Nuclear	62	62%
	Joint	38	38%
Birth Order	First	46	46%
	Second	38	38%
	Third & above	16	16%
SES	Low	28	28%
	Middle	50	50%
	High	22	22%

These demographic variables are important because **parenting practices and child well-being often vary by SES and family structure**. Research shows that parental warmth and involvement can be



associated with socioeconomic background, affecting children’s psychological outcomes. For instance, **positive parenting styles are significantly related to subjective well-being across diverse age groups**, and this relationship is moderated by contextual variables such as family environment and cultural background.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Sample N=100**

As the table 2 reports shows that the mean scores and variability in the sample across the key variables:

- Authoritative Parenting recorded the highest mean score, indicating it was the most prevalent style among parents in the sample.
- Authoritarian and Neglectful Parenting had lower mean scores, reflecting less warmth or involvement.
- Children’s mean well-being score (75.9) and mean happiness score (72.4) were relatively high, suggesting overall positive emotional functioning.

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Parenting Styles, Happiness, and Well-being N=100**

Variable	Mean	SD
<b>Authoritative Parenting</b>	38.5	5.2
<b>Authoritarian Parenting</b>	29.4	6.1
<b>Permissive Parenting</b>	31.2	5.7
<b>Neglectful Parenting</b>	24.8	6.5
<b>Happiness</b>	72.4	8.6
<b>Well-being</b>	75.9	7.9

These findings are consistent with recent research showing that positive or warm parenting styles have a significant positive association with subjective well-being, while negative or controlling styles show negative associations. The meta-analysis by Tan et al. (2024) found that positive parenting styles were significantly positively correlated with life satisfaction and positive affect, and negatively correlated with negative affect in children and youth. This supports the idea that warm, responsive parenting (such as authoritative parenting) promotes emotional health and happiness in early childhood.

**Table 3: Correlation Between Parenting Styles and Happiness & Well-being**



Parenting Style	Happiness	Well-being
Authoritative	0.68	0.72
Authoritarian	-0.45	-0.48
Permissive	0.32	0.28
Neglectful	-0.56	-0.60

In line with table 3 revealed that Correlation results reflect the strength and direction of relationships among variables:

- Authoritative parenting was strongly positively correlated with both children’s happiness ( $r = 0.68$ ) and well-being ( $r = 0.72$ ), indicating that higher levels of supportive, warm, and responsive parenting are associated with more positive emotional outcomes in children.
- Authoritarian and neglectful parenting showed significant negative correlations with happiness and well-being, suggesting that harsh or emotionally distant parenting adversely impacts children’s psychological health.
- Permissive parenting showed a weak positive association, reflecting that warmth alone without consistent guidance may support some aspects of well-being but not as strongly as authoritative parenting.

These patterns reflect findings from contemporary research on parenting and subjective well-being. A recent large meta-analysis reported that positive parenting styles — which emphasize emotional support — are significantly linked to higher subjective well-being and life satisfaction, while negative parenting is linked to increased negative affect in children.

Additionally, studies have shown that parental emotional warmth — a key element of authoritative parenting — is positively related to children’s subjective well-being, whereas rejecting or overprotective behaviors have negative effects. Although that particular study focused on primary school students, the underlying psychosocial mechanisms are relevant to preschool development

**Table 4: t-Test Comparing Happiness**

Group	Mean	t-value	Significance
Authoritative	78.2	4.85	Significant
Non-authoritative	66.4		



This table 4 compares happiness levels between children raised with authoritative versus non-authoritative parenting:

- Children in the authoritative group had significantly higher happiness levels ( $M = 78.2$ ) than children in the non-authoritative group ( $M = 66.4$ ).
- The  $t$ -value of 4.85 (significant) confirms that this difference is statistically meaningful.

This aligns with evidence showing that children whose parents provide emotional warmth, responsiveness, and reasonable autonomy support are more likely to have higher life satisfaction and emotional well-being. The study by Hengyi et al. (2024) found that parental emotional warmth correlates positively with subjective well-being, while rejecting or overprotective behaviors relate negatively — reinforcing the idea that warmth and positive engagement contribute directly to child happiness. These results suggest that fostering authoritative parenting practices in early childhood can have measurable benefits for emotional health and happiness.

**Table 5: Regression Analysis Predicting Well-being**

Predictor	$\beta$	$t$	Sig.
Authoritative Parenting	0.61	5.42	0.001
Authoritarian Parenting	-0.34	-3.12	0.002
Socioeconomic Status	0.29	2.85	0.005

**$R^2 = 0.58$**

Regression analysis table 5 examines the predictive influence of parenting styles and SES on children's well-being:

- Authoritative parenting had the strongest positive predictive effect ( $\beta = 0.61, p < 0.01$ ), indicating it is a major contributor to well-being outcomes.
- Authoritarian parenting had a significant negative effect ( $\beta = -0.34, p < 0.01$ ).
- Socioeconomic status was also a significant positive predictor ( $\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$ ), highlighting the role of broader contextual resources.

The model explained 58% of the variance in well-being, which is substantial in social science research and highlights how parenting practices combined with socioeconomic factors shape emotional outcomes.



Recent systematic reviews confirm that parenting styles emphasizing emotional bonding and warmth are positively related to family and child well-being, while negative forms such as authoritarian or overprotective practices are inversely associated.

### **Discussion and Interpretation:**

The findings of the present study clearly indicate that parenting style plays a crucial role in shaping the happiness and well-being of preschool children. The demographic profile of the sample revealed that most children belonged to nuclear families and middle socioeconomic status, which reflects the changing family structure in urban India. This demographic background is significant because previous studies have shown that family type and socioeconomic status influence parenting behavior and children's emotional development. Children from middle-income families generally receive better educational exposure and parental involvement, which contributes positively to their emotional and psychological development. Similar observations were reported by recent studies emphasizing that family environment and parental engagement significantly affect children's emotional health and social competence (Tan et al., 2024).

The analysis of parenting styles showed that authoritative parenting had the highest mean score among the participants, followed by permissive parenting, while authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles were comparatively lower. This indicates that most parents practiced a balanced approach involving warmth, responsiveness, and reasonable discipline. The high mean scores obtained for children's happiness and well-being further support this finding. Children raised in authoritative households exhibited better emotional regulation, confidence, and social adjustment. These findings are consistent with recent research, which states that authoritative parenting promotes emotional security and psychological resilience in children (Frontiers in Psychology, 2024). Studies conducted after 2020 have consistently shown that children raised in emotionally supportive environments demonstrate higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction.

The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between authoritative parenting and both happiness and well-being, while authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles showed a significant negative relationship. This indicates that when parents adopt warm, supportive, and communicative parenting practices, children tend to exhibit greater emotional stability and happiness. On the other hand, harsh discipline, emotional neglect, and lack of parental involvement negatively affect a child's emotional development. These findings align with a large-scale meta-analysis by Tan et al. (2024), which reported that positive parenting styles are significantly associated with higher subjective



well-being, whereas negative parenting practices are linked to increased emotional problems and lower life satisfaction in children.

The t-test analysis further strengthened these findings by demonstrating a significant difference in happiness levels between children exposed to authoritative parenting and those exposed to non-authoritative styles. Children raised under authoritative parenting scored significantly higher in happiness, indicating that parental warmth, responsiveness, and consistent guidance contribute substantially to positive emotional outcomes. This result supports earlier research suggesting that emotional availability and supportive parenting foster a sense of security, autonomy, and confidence in children, which ultimately enhances their happiness and psychological health (Hengyi et al., 2024).

The regression analysis highlighted authoritative parenting as the strongest predictor of children's well-being, followed by socioeconomic status. The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in well-being, indicating that parenting practices play a more influential role than demographic factors alone. Although socioeconomic status also contributed positively, parenting style emerged as the most significant determinant. This finding aligns with recent evidence suggesting that while financial resources support child development, emotional support and parental involvement have a stronger and more direct influence on children's psychological well-being (PubMed, 2023–2024). Studies further emphasize that children from supportive families exhibit better emotional adjustment regardless of economic background.

Overall, the findings of the present study clearly demonstrate that parenting style is a key determinant of happiness and well-being among preschool children. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and appropriate discipline, significantly enhances children's emotional health, while authoritarian and neglectful styles hinder positive development. These findings are consistent with contemporary research and reinforce the importance of promoting positive parenting practices through parental education programs, counselling, and community awareness initiatives. Encouraging parents to adopt nurturing and supportive parenting approaches can play a vital role in fostering emotionally healthy and happy children during the crucial preschool years.

### **Conclusion:**

The present study examined the influence of parenting styles on happiness and well-being among preschool children and revealed several important findings. The results clearly indicate that parenting style plays a significant role in shaping the emotional and psychological development of young children.



Among the different parenting styles, **authoritative parenting emerged as the most beneficial**, showing a strong positive association with both happiness and well-being. Children raised in nurturing, responsive, and supportive environments exhibited higher levels of emotional stability, confidence, and overall life satisfaction.

The study also found that **authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles were negatively associated with children's happiness and well-being**, suggesting that excessive control, lack of warmth, or emotional unavailability can adversely affect a child's emotional development. These findings reinforce the idea that early childhood is a sensitive period during which parental behavior has a long-lasting impact on emotional health.

The correlation and regression analyses further confirmed that parenting style is a significant predictor of children's well-being, even after considering socioeconomic factors. Although socioeconomic status contributed to children's development, parenting behavior had a stronger and more direct influence on emotional outcomes. This highlights the importance of parenting practices over material resources alone in shaping a child's happiness.

The findings of the study are consistent with recent research, which emphasizes that emotional warmth, consistent discipline, and positive parent-child interaction are crucial for developing self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social competence in children. The results also underline the importance of parental awareness programs and early childhood interventions that promote positive parenting strategies.

In conclusion, the study establishes that **authoritative parenting plays a vital role in enhancing happiness and well-being among preschool children**, while negative parenting styles hinder healthy emotional development. The study recommends incorporating parenting education programs, counseling services, and community awareness initiatives to help parents adopt effective parenting practices. Such efforts can significantly contribute to the holistic development and emotional well-being of children during their formative years.

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