
Comparison of Family Hardiness, Parenting Sense of Competency and Parenting Styles between Adoptive Parents and Biological Parents

Sreeparna Kar

Department of Psychology, Government General Degree College, Singur, West Bengal
E-mail address: srndatta106@gmail.com

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Abstract: Parenting is considered the most difficult yet most rewarding job depicting the challenging responsibilities of parenthood, but at the same time, it also provides individuals with a sense of meaning in life. Research has documented the significant impact of family and parenting factors on child behavior, but very few studies have taken into consideration different types of families. In this study attempt has been made to focus on three aspects of family and parenting behavior, viz, family hardiness, parental sense of competency and parenting styles among adoptive parents and biological parents. A cross-sectional study was conducted in the Hooghly district of West Bengal using a pre-fixed questionnaire. The sample consisted of 50 couples having adopted child and 61 couples having biological child. The sample was selected according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. Results show significant differences between adoptive mothers and biological mothers with respect to family hardiness, parenting sense of competence, authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style and significant differences between adoptive fathers and biological fathers with respect to authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style.

Key words: Parenting style; family hardiness; parenting competency; adopted child; biological child.

1 Introduction

Parenting has always been considered the most difficult as well as most rewarding job – this statement itself depicts the challenging responsibilities of parenthood also providing them with a sense of meaning in life [1-3]. “Parenting” is generally defined as behavior of parents associated with raising, supporting, and socializing children throughout their lives. However, parenting roles are frequently accompanied by strains and stress. Parenting strains or stress are defined as experienced difficulties coupled with demands and conflicts associated with the parenting role. Impact of family and parenting factors upon child behavior has been an area of predominant research and results have reflected these factors to be implicated in the development of children [4,5,6,7]. A host of different

parenting styles have now been identified, and researches depict that parents demonstrating support, concern, active communication, and mutual respect have children with greater life satisfaction than of children having parents demonstrating psychological control, neglect, and harshness [8-14]. So, to put in correctly, family and parental factors shape children’s behaviour, and different types of families definitely bring out different outcomes in the children.

This study has tried to specifically focus on three aspects of family and parenting behaviour, viz family hardiness, parental sense of competency and parenting styles. Kobasa (1979) had introduced the term ‘Hardiness’ as a personality trait [15]. It was observed that some individuals in response to stressful life situations do not experience deleterious effects. Kobasa had

elaborated that, “persons who experience high degrees of stress without falling ill have a personality structure differentiating them from persons who become sick under stress. This personality difference is best characterized by the term hardiness” [15]. Instantaneously, the concept gained momentum and soon after it got termed as individual hardiness [16] or psychological hardiness [17] in health-related and relevant research literature. Another term which was forwarded in due course was referred as ‘family hardiness’ given by McCubbin et al. (1986) to illustrate the pattern in which families respond and adapt to stressful life events [18]. In addition to previous researches which have documented family hardiness to be a protective factor cushioning families from the adverse effects of stressful life events, McCubbin et al. (1986) described family hardiness as an important family strength having positive outcomes on family and individual family member functioning [18].

The next variable in this study is parenting sense of competency which is a construct extracted from social—cognitive perspective [19-20]. Parental competence has been defined as “the practical abilities parents have to nurture, protect, and educate their children, and to ensure them a sufficiently healthy development” [21], which is now been considered a key element in positive parenting [22]. Considerable researches have targeted to unravel parental competence at various developmental stages: childhood [23-24], adolescence or emerging adulthood [25-26] wherein different viewpoints were also taken into consideration: from parents’ own perception of their competency [27-28,24] to the child’s perspective as to how they experienced parental competence [29] or incorporating both perspectives [30]. In this study, parental competency has been investigated from parents’ own perception of their performance. The last variable under investigation in the study is parenting styles. Parenting style can be described as a cluster of parental attitudes and behaviors toward children

while also encompassing the emotional climate in which the parents express their behaviors [31]. In the arena of parenting studies, the typological approaches towards conception of parenting forwarded by Maccoby and Martin (1983) and Baumrind (1991) have had a massive impact, where they categorized parenting practices into four types on the basis of responsiveness and demandingness [32-33]. Authoritative parenting style is generally characterized as high responsiveness and demandingness, where parents in addition to providing support and warmth, also explicitly define rules and consistent discipline [33]. Authoritarian parenting style is typified as low responsiveness but high in demandingness, where parents tend to use hostile control or harsh punishment, rather arbitrarily, in order to gain compliance, thereby hardly providing explanation or allowing verbal discussions. An indulgent parenting style is distinguished by low demandingness and high responsiveness. Here parents display responsiveness to their children’s needs and satisfy them, but fail to impart appropriate disciplinary actions or behavioral controls upon the child but demands mature behaviors. Finally, neglectful parenting style is identified as low in responsiveness and demandingness where parents are self-centred and seldom engage themselves in child-rearing practices. This form of parenting, lacks warmth, and they do not even set rules for their children. In this study, an attempt has been made to study two very different types of families – couples having adopted children and couples having biological children with respect to their family hardiness, parenting sense of competency and parenting styles. In this study, a deliberate attempt has been made to provide a comparative analysis between adoptive parents and biological parents with respect to family hardiness, parenting sense of competency and parenting styles.

Aim of the study

The study aims to find out if there exists any difference between biological parents and adoptive parents with respect to family hardiness, parenting sense of competence and parenting styles.

Objective 1: Compare adoptive parents with biological parents (both fathers and mothers) in respect to their family hardiness.

Objective 2: Compare adoptive parents with biological parents (both fathers and mothers) in respect to their parenting sense of competency.

Objective 3: Compare adoptive parents with biological parents (both fathers and mothers) in respect to their parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive).

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant difference between parents (mothers and fathers) having biological child and parents (mothers and fathers) having adoptive child with respect to family hardiness.

H2: There will be a significant difference between parents (mothers and fathers) having biological child and parents (mothers and fathers) having adoptive child with respect to parental sense of competency.

H3: There will be a significant difference between parents (mothers and fathers) having biological child and parents (mothers and fathers) having adoptive child with respect to parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive).

2 Methods

Study participants and procedure

Table 1: Sample demographics of adoptive and biological parents

	Adoptive	Biological	Total
Mother	50	61	111
Father	50	61	111

Table 2: Demographics revealing preparedness for adoption among adoptive parents

	Highly Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Prepared
Mother	25	5	20
Father	8	8	34

The study was conducted in the Hooghly district of West Bengal from November 2022 to June 2023. Two groups of participants were recruited viz, adoptive parents and biological parents. Cross-sectional data were collected using a pre-structured questionnaire. For this study, a total number of 75 adoptive parents and 66 biological parents were reached out, out of which 50 couples (n = 100) having adopted a child and 61 couples (n = 122) having biological child had given consent to participate in the study. The present age range for mothers (with biological and adoptive

children) is 30-41 years, and the age range for fathers (with biological and adoptive children) is 34-44 years. The age of parents (mothers and fathers) who have biological child ranged from 20-30 and 27-39 years respectively (when the child was born). The age of parents (mothers and fathers) who have adopted child ranged from 25-34 and 29-38 years (when they had adopted the child).

The age of the adopted children at the time of adoption was between 1-3 years, and the present age of the adopted children ranged from 5-6 years. The present age of the bi-

ological children was also matched to 5-6 years. All the couples belonged to Hindu religion.

Table 3: Demographics related to father's occupation

n=111	Frequency	%
Business	36	32.43
Govt. Service	38	34.23
Pvt. Service	22	19.81
Cultivator/Labourer	15	13.51

Data was collected from the couples who were residing in Hooghly district of West Bengal. The couples were individually contacted and were explained regarding the purpose of the study. Participants who had agreed voluntarily were only included in the study and was informed that in case of any difficulty they can withdraw from the study at any time. Approximately 20 minutes required to collect data from each of the participants and data was collected by visiting the houses of each of the couples. Both husband and wife individually had to fill up the questionnaire. The research was approved by the Institutional Ethical and Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC).

For this study, participants were selected in accordance to the inclusion and exclusion criteria so as to maintain the homogeneity of the sample. The participants adhering to the following criteria were selected for the study – (1) The present age of the biological/adoptive child will be within 5 – 6 years, (2) The age of the adopted children at the time of adoption will be within 1-3 years, (3) In case of adoptive parents, there is only one adopted child, (4) In case of biological parents there is one biological child, (5) for both types of couples who had biological and adopted child, mothers were housewives and fathers were working and (6) Couples have adopted the child from a centralized adoption institution, (7) The nationality of the adopted child will be Indian. (8) Couples should be Bengalee. On the other hand, participants falling under the following criteria were excluded from the study

– (1) Couples who are divorced, separated or living away from home due to occupation, (2) Parents with child with previous history of abuse, neglect or serious psychiatric or medical conditions, (3) Parents who have suffered miscarriage or still birth, (4) Adoptive mothers who had conceived. In the present study, attention was given on the differences between adopted parents and biological parents regarding family hardiness, parenting sense of competency and parenting style rather than on exploring their journey of adoption and experience of parenthood.

3 Measures

Socio-Demographic: Socio-demographic details included a semi structured performa, containing information about socio-demographic variables like present age of parent, age of parent at time of adoption or when they had their biological child, ethnicity of parent, annual income, occupation of both couples, present age of child, age of the child during adoption. They were also asked about if there was a history of psychological/ chronic physiological illness, any kind of abuse or neglect faced in the past and any significant life events in the past two years to understand the participants better.

In this study family hardiness was measured using by the **family hardiness index (FHI)** developed by McCubbin, McCubbin, & Thompson, (1986) [18]. It is a 20-item self-report measure which assesses the characteristics of hardiness as a

stress resistance and adaptation resource for families [18,34] using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *false* (0), *mostly false* (1), *mostly true* (2), to *true* (3). Scores range from 0 to 60, high score on the scale indicate higher level of family hardiness. Research on the FHI has shown an acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$), with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of $= .791$ and good construct validity as evidenced by the factor loadings of the different hardiness factors [18].

The Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC) [35], is a 16-item, self-report measure was used to measure parenting sense of competency which assess parenting self-efficacy and satisfaction as a parent on a 6-point Likert scale, which ranges from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). The PSOC comprise of two subscales – 1) Satisfaction and 2) Efficacy. The Satisfaction subscale score generally ranges from 9-54 and the efficacy subscale scores ranges from 7-42. The total scores of the scale generally ranges from 16-96, where higher scores reflecting greater parenting self-efficacy.

Parenting style was assessed using the

Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) which is a 32-item version developed by Robinson and his colleagues in 2001 using Confirmatory Factor Analysis/Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) [36-37]. Out of 32 items, 15 measured authoritative parenting style; 12 items tapped into authoritarian parenting style; and the remaining 5 are about the permissive parenting style. Again, among the 15 items about authoritative parenting style, there are 3 subfactors: the connection dimension, the regulation dimension and the autonomy dimension. Also, the 12 items about authoritarian parenting style can also be grouped into 3 subfactors – the physical coercion dimension, the verbal hostility dimension and the non-reasoning/ punitive dimension. All the 5 items about the permissive parenting style belong to the indulgent dimension.

Data analysis

To fulfil the objectives (comparing the two groups) t-tests was done to observe the differences between adoptive and biological parents.

4 Results and Discussion

Table 4: Showing the mean score for adoptive and biological mothers and the differences between them on selected variables.

Variables	Mean score of adoptive mothers	Mean score of biological mothers	t
Family hardiness	43.81	37.31	4.96**
Parenting sense of competence	70.16	62.06	5.59**
Authoritarian parenting style	25.42	34.5	3.64**
Authoritative parenting style	51.89	53.75	1
Permissive parenting style	10.5	14.16	5.55**

Note. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .001$.

Table 5: Showing the mean score for adoptive and biological fathers and the differences between them on selected variables.

Variables	Mean score of adoptive fathers	Mean score of biological fathers	t
Family hardiness	41.62	39.28	1.56
Parenting sense of competence	67.62	65.12	1.84
Authoritarian parenting style	23.50	27.68	2.06*
Authoritative parenting style	47.84	51.15	1.4
Permissive parenting style	9.53	13.53	5.70**

Note. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .001$.

Results from Table 4 show that significant differences exist between adoptive mothers and biological mothers with respect to family hardiness, parenting sense of competence, authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style. Whereas results from Table 5 show that significant differences exist between adoptive father and biological father with respect to authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style. So here, hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 are partially accepted. The mean score for family hardiness and parenting sense of competency is greater in adoptive mothers, whereas the mean score for authoritarian and parenting sense of competence is greater in biological mothers. The mean score for authoritarian and permissive parenting styles is greater in the biological father.

5 Discussion

Comparison of family hardiness between adopted couples and biological couples

The first objective of the study was to compare adoptive couples and biological couples in terms of family hardiness. Previous studies have documented that in case of parental stress; it is found that adoptive parents experience much more amount of parental stress than their biological counterparts [38]. Studies have gone forward to substantiate these findings by saying that as parents with adoptive child need

to manage or control additional stressors, which may encompass previous coping with infertility issues, stigma about adoption, and uncertainty about the child's arrival [3,5,6] these leads to parenting stress. Hardiness can be defined as a personal resilience characteristic that referring one's ability to effectively manage challenging situations [15, 39]. Hardiness and family hardiness are protective factors that have all been found to buffer against the negative effects of parenting stress for adoptive parents [40, 41, 42]. In this study there has been a significant difference in family hardiness in case of adoptive and biological mothers but not in case of fathers, but the score for family hardiness is greater in case of adoptive parents in both mothers and fathers. It may be that as adoptive parents especially mothers generally have to undergo quite a considerable portion of stressful and negative circumstances prior to adoption and issues related to infertility/childlessness they may develop a quality of resilience to bounce back from any negative and unforeseen situations.

Comparison of parenting sense of competency between adopted couples and biological couples

The next objective of the study was to compare the parenting sense of competency among adoptive couples and biological couples. Results have shown significant differences in parenting sense of

competency among adopted mothers and biological mothers, but no such significant differences are observed in case of adopted fathers and biological fathers. The parental sense of competency score is seen to be greater in case of adoptive mothers. Parental sense of competence can be defined as parent's belief in their ability to effectively handle the challenges of raising a child. It is true that both in case of adoptive parents and biological parents the transition into parenthood poses certain challenges and demands upon them which is also influenced by several other factors. In a study by Cooley and Petren on 'Foster parent perceptions of competency' have shown that the variation in the parental competence perceived by foster caregivers is influenced to a considerable extent by the self-perception of the foster parents themselves before initiating their duty as caregivers [43]. This finding can be used to explain the results of this study, since adoptive mothers need to prepare themselves and undergo a period of waiting and training before the incorporation of the child happens within the family so they tend to be well-adjusted as caregivers beforehand. This might be a reason for their increased parental competence score in comparison to their counterparts.

Comparison of parenting style between adopted couples and biological couples

The last objective of the study was to investigate the differences in the parenting styles (if any) among adoptive couples and biological couples. Significant differences have been observed between adopted mothers and biological mothers with respect to authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style with mean scores of adoptive mothers being lower in case of both parenting styles. Similar picture has been observed in case of adoptive fathers, where significant differences have been observed in case of Authoritarian and Permissive parenting style, with adoptive fathers scoring less in both

the parenting styles. According to the parenting styles categorized by Baumrind, authoritarian parents emphasize on qualities such as obedience, conformity, and respect for authority. Parents generally show relatively little affection or support for individuation, on the contrary permissive parents set few demands for the child and do not enforce rules but they are warm and accepting. On the other hand, authoritative parenting strikes a balance between warmth and structure, emphasizing support, affection, regulation, and fostering autonomy. Previous researches on parental styles have shown that 'authoritative' parental style to be the best strategy for developing and nurturing a child [47, 45, 46, 33, 44, 48, 32, 49]. Result of the study reflect that despite differences observed between adoptive and biological parents in terms of authoritarian and permissive parenting both types of parents is seen to use authoritative parenting style as their dominant child rearing style.

6 Conclusion

There are limited researches exploring parenting dimensions in adoptive families and so there is scarce knowledge about the differences between families with adoptive children and with biological children. This study attempted to provide a basic understanding of the comparison between adoptive parents and biological parents with respect to family hardiness, parenting sense of competency and parenting styles. The findings of the study suggest differences between adoptive mothers and biological mothers with respect to family hardiness, parenting sense of competence, authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style and differences between adoptive fathers and biological fathers with respect to authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style. Parenting itself is demanding because of the different roles and expectations that people have to deliver on individual level as well as soci-

etal level. Parenting cognitions and concepts are shaped to a large extent by societal norms which includes numerous cognitive and emotional processes involved regarding what is expected out of a parent. Parenting dynamics is not only about how well one delivers the role but also about how one conceptualizes and approaches it also. The findings of this study implicates that differences among parents from different family type do exist with regard to their hardiness, sense of competency and also their parenting styles which calls for further investigation about the pattern and nature in which parents from different types approach parenting which includes child rearing styles as also experiencing a sense of competency in delivering parental roles. These findings also provide essential insights into the parenting dynamics of both the type of families which could be further expanded to investigate how these contribute to the developmental trajectories of children coming from different family types.

7 Limitations

There are a few limitations of the current study that are important to mention. While the study uniquely contributes to the knowledge regarding family and parenting factors between adoptive and biological parents, the sample size of the study is small for it to have adequate generalizability. Next, it would have been better if socio demographic variables could also be studied with respect to parenting.

Research has documented that it's more stressful for parents who are adopting older children [50, 51] which is generally attributed to the issues concerned with older adopted child like problems originating from previous placements (i.e., interrupted attachment, attachment difficulties, learned maladaptive coping strategies). In this study focus has only been given to children adopted between the

age 1-3. Moreover, in this study, data have been collected from parents who had adopted the child when they were 1-3 years of age, but presently their age is between 5-6 years, so there is a time lag between adoption and data taking. It would be better if data data-taking procedure could be done within 6 months to 1 year of adoption.

As we know that different stages of child development pose different kinds of stressors and demands on parents, it would be insightful if data could be collected from adoptive parents having adopted child from various age groups. Again, it would provide a better picture if the study could incorporate child outcome behaviors as well, which would provide a better understanding of how family and parenting factors would contribute in child behavior. Next, various other parental factors could have been incorporated in the study for a more enhanced understanding on this topic. As purposive sampling was used therefore the sample may not be representative of the population of adoptive parents.

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