

## Effect of Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem on Subject Well-being among Chinese Medical Students

Yan Wang and Zhao-Ping Jiang

*School of Philosophy, Wuhan University, Wuhan, China*

Email: jzp001cn@163.com

**[Abstract]** The current study discussed the effects of parenting styles and self-esteem on subject well-being among Chinese medical students. A self-administered survey was conducted to collect data from Wei Fang, a middle city in the north part of China. The results showed that parenting styles could affect the subjects' well-being, and their self-esteem was positively related to subject well-being. In addition, self-esteem also demonstrated moderating effects in some of the parenting styles and subject well-being relationships. The implications of these findings are discussed. This empirical study can provide a reliable theoretical foundation to medical students and promote their subject well-being.

**[Keywords]** Chinese medical students; parenting styles; self-esteem; subject well-being

### Introduction

As the country's future hope, college students suffer all kinds of pressures from society, parents, and peer competition. While, medical students are a special group, they also shoulder the responsibility of healing the wounded and rescuing dying people, so their psychological health deserves more in-depth study. Subjective well-being is an important index of one's life satisfaction and physical and mental health. It also has a significant impact on individual growth and development of a person's future. Parenting styles refer to the idea that parents in daily life have different education ideas and education attitudes. What's more, different styles of parenting obviously have different influences on individual subjective well-being. The level of self-esteem is the leading cause of psychological health. So, we explored the effect of parenting styles and self-esteem on subject well-being among Chinese medical students. This will provide a reliable theoretical basis for improving Chinese medical students' well-being and promoting their health.

### Parenting Styles as a Predictor of Subject Well-being

Nancy Darling and Laurence Steinberg (1993) reported that parenting styles were a series of attitudes in mutual communication between parents and children; the attitudes combined together could form a kind of emotional atmosphere, and parenting styles expressed in this kind of atmosphere impacted children. Deneve (1999) was the first psychologist to study subjective well-being. He thought life satisfaction was the main factor to measure subjective well-being. However, there were also different definitions of well-being. In general, the present scholars divided subjective well-being into three parts: life satisfaction, positive affection, and negative affection.

At the same time, some people thought parenting styles would influence individual psychological health. Liang (1995) pointed that parents had too much punishment, rejection, denial, and interference if they also had preference and overprotection at the same time. This contradiction would probably affect children's mental health level. Guo (2005) thought parents' warm feelings and understanding had a significant negative correlation to students' bad psychological conditions. Parents who were harsh and expressed denial and parents' overprotection and excessive interference all had a significant positive correlation with students' bad psychological conditions. Wang (1998) also reported that parenting styles had a close relationship with middle school students' mental health. However, different parenting styles had different influences on students' mental health.

On the other hand, parenting styles were an objective factor that could influence subjective well-being. Zheng (2011) pointed out that the family environment and parenting styles could affect adolescents' subjective well-being. Zhang (2006) also thought that there was a significant correlation between parents'

positive parenting styles and learning. A mother's warm understanding and a father's severe punishment for primary and middle school students' learning could predict their children's well-being. Moreover, Zhang (2008) pointed out that parenting styles based on different roles could influence the subjective well-being of college students.

### **The Role of Self-esteem as a Mechanism Intervening between Parenting Styles and Subject Well-being**

Zhang (2012) believed that personality played a completely intermediary role between fathers' parenting styles and self-esteem. What's more, fathers' styles could improve the level of individual self-esteem via personality. Han (2008) said high self-esteem had a very significant positive correlation or negative correlation with parenting styles. Meanwhile, different high school students' parenting styles had different influences on self-esteem. On the other hand, Han (2005) reported that parenting styles had a huge influence on the formation of children's self-esteem, and improving parenting styles was conducive to the formation of the individual's self-esteem. Peng (2007) thought that children who had democratic parents would possess high self-esteem and others who had arbitrary types of parents had low self-esteem. Zhou (2005) also thought that explicit self-esteem could positively impact on mental health. Zhang (2004) also thought that individual factors, such as self-esteem, social support and attribution, had a significant influence on happiness.

Therefore, this study focuses on the research of medical students' parenting styles, self-esteem, and subjective well-being. The study of this group (medical students) is more difficult compared to other groups (general people). In a word, the effects of their parenting styles and self-esteem on subjective well-being should be further studied. So this research could provide empirical materials and theoretical basis for improving medical students' well-being.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Using random sampling, we selected 200 medical students in a medical college. Students were asked to complete three questionnaires; later, we collected them and analyzed the data.

### ***Instruments***

We used EMBU to measure parenting styles. The scale was made jointly in Swedish Umea University (Perris, 1980); it was used to evaluate attitudes and behaviors of parents. The inventory consisted of 81 titles and 15 kinds of parenting styles. Among them, the fathers' styles were divided into six factors and the mothers' styles were divided into five factors. The self-esteem scale (SES) could measure personal self-esteem. The questionnaire was designed by Rosenberg (Rosenberg, 1965). It was used to assess the individual about the overall feeling of self-worth and self-acceptance. The scale was made up of ten items; participants could select one option in accordance with the condition of their body and mind.

We used the Index of Well-Being and the Index of General Affect to measure well-being. The scale was formulated by Campbell (Campbell, 1976). It evaluated the current happiness of participants. The original scale was composed of two subscales: one was overall emotional scale and consisted of eight topics; the other scale was life satisfaction scale and had only one topic. These three scales all had good reliability and validity.

## **Results**

### ***Descriptive Statistics and Correlations***

As shown in Table 1, fathers' warmth and understanding, preference, refusal, and overprotection all have a significant correlation with self-esteem, but interference is not significantly correlated with self-esteem. Fathers' warmth and understanding is negative correlated with self-esteem; other factors are positively correlated with it. Understanding and warmth, refusal, severe punishment, and overprotection are significantly correlated with subjective well-being, but other factors are not significant with well-being.

Table 1

*The Relationships of Father's Styles, Self-Esteem and Subjective Well-Being*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Understanding	1							
2. Punishing	-0.32**	1						
3. Interference	0.21**	0.45**	1					
4. Preference	0.02	0.41**	0.12	1				
5. Refusal	-0.32**	0.77**	0.40**	0.36**	1			
6. Overprotection	0.01	0.48**	0.50**	0.23**	0.47**	1		
7. Self-esteem	-0.17*	0.17*	0.04	0.16*	0.19**	0.14*	1	
8. Well-being	0.20**	-0.18*	-0.02	0.00	-0.15*	-0.12*	-0.33*	1

Note : \*P&lt;0.05, \*\*P&lt;0.01

As seen in Table 2, mothers' understanding, refusal, punishing, and preference are significantly correlated with self-esteem, but mother's interference and overprotection are not significantly associated with self-esteem. In a word, mothers' understanding is negatively correlated with children's self-esteem. Other factors are positively correlated with it. Meanwhile, self-esteem has a significant negative correlation with well-being. Mothers' warmth and understanding, refusal, and punishing are correlated with subjective well-being; as for other factors, there are no significant correlations.

Table 2

*The Relationships of Mother's Styles, Self-Esteem and Subjective Well-Being*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Understanding	1						
2. Interference and overprotection	0.10	1					
3. Refusal	-0.45**	0.48**	1				
4. Punishing	-0.44**	0.47**	0.82**	1			
5. Preference	-0.06	0.16*	0.34**	0.34**	1		
6. Self-esteem	-0.19**	0.06	0.18*	0.15*	0.16*	1	
7. Well-being	0.19**	-0.05	-0.16*	-0.14*	-0.03	-0.33*	1

Note : \*P&lt;0.05, \*\*P&lt;0.01

***Examining the Mediation Model***

As shown in Table 3, we let gender, the factors of fathers' styles and self-esteem be the independent variable, subjective well-being were the dependent variable; we performed regression analysis, and the results show that gender can significantly predict subjective well-being. Fathers' warmth and understanding not only can directly predict well-being, but also will indirectly predict well-being via self-esteem.

Table 3  
Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem on Happiness Regression Analysis (Father)

Independent variables		R	$\Delta R^2$	F	B	t
Step1	Gender	0.21	0.04	8.96	1.06	3.11**
Step2		0.27	0.04	1.13		
	Understanding				0.16	2.25*
	Punishing				-0.11	-1.46
	Interference				0.03	0.45
	Preference				0.01	0.20
	Refusal				-0.09	-0.20
	Overprotection				-0.05	-0.59
Step3	Self-esteem	0.43	0.15	23.40	-0.34	-4.84***

Note : \*P<0.05, \*\*P<0.01, \*\*\*P<0.001

As seen in Table 4, we let gender, the factors of mothers' styles and self-esteem be the independent variable. Subjective well-being was the dependent variable. We performed regression analysis, and the results show that gender can significantly predict subjective well-being. Mothers' warmth and understanding not only can directly predict well-being, but also will indirectly predict well-being via self-esteem.

Table 4  
Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem on Happiness Regression Analysis (Mother)

Independent variables		R	$\Delta R^2$	F	B	t
Step1	Gender	0.21	0.04	9.10	0.93	
3.02**						
Step2		0.26	0.07	0.97		
	Understanding				0.16	2.20*
	Refusal				-0.09	-1.10
	Punishing				-0.08	-0.99
	Preference				-0.01	-0.09
	Interference and overprotection				0.04	0.54
Step3	Self-esteem				-0.34	-
5.00***						

Note : \*P<0.05, \*\*P<0.01, \*\*\*P<0.001

### Decision and Conclusion

The results found that parents' warmth and understanding was significantly correlated with self-esteem, and it also could predict subjective well-being. This means if parents give their children more warmth, help, and understanding, their children would have higher self-esteem. On the contrary, if parents are relatively harsh and severely punished their children, then these would increase the negative psychology of their children. What's more, their children's self-esteem would be affected. Qian's research (1998) also showed that the more warmth and understanding the parents gave to children, the higher level of self-esteem their children would have. The reason might be that parents gave their children more love in

their children's difficulties, which will increase children's self-esteem and self-efficacy. Research also showed that parents' refusal also had a significant negative correlation with self-esteem. Zhang (1998) also showed that children with more supports will have higher self-esteem and healthy bodies and minds. Hu (2002) also verified this point.

In addition, Zeng (2010) also found that self-esteem was significantly an effect on subjective well-being. It also proved the result of our study. According to the regression analysis, parenting warmth and understanding could not only directly improve personal subjective well-being, but also could affect well-being via self-esteem. Self-esteem played a very important role in personal well-being. Therefore, parents should be full of support and help and should not overly spoil children. As for decisions children are making, parents should give their children more support, and this will greatly improve the child's self-esteem and self-efficacy and further promote their life satisfaction and happiness. If parents always refuse and deny their children, they will lose confidence and interest in everything.

In conclusion, parents should focus on their parenting styles in our daily life and get along with children in a more harmonious and friendly way. They are supposed to always put the child's physical and mental health first and improve their children's self-esteem. In this way, children will more cherish the time together with their parents and learn good mental quality from their parents. It is very beneficial to children's development. Parents are very important in the process of children's growing; the more things children learn from their parents, the more confidence and self-esteem and strong psychological qualities they will get. This will make them have more well-being and live a better life.

There are also some limitations in our study. First, because the participants were limited to students at a single medical college in China, it is not possible to generalize these findings to students at other universities in China or other countries. Second, we used a cross-sectional study. Future research should use longitudinal research designs to address causality. Third, as all my analyses relied on self-report data, it is possible that the analysis may involve common method biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, it still provides a theoretical basis to promote the self-esteem and well-being of Chinese medical students.

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