

Overindulgence, Parenting Styles, and Parent Sense of Competence
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Is overindulgence related to specific parenting styles? And, is there a relationship between lack of parenting skills, parenting satisfaction, and parental overindulgence? These are questions Walcheski and Bredehoft (2010) investigated in a recent study reported at the 2010 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference.

Three concepts encompass the definition of overindulgence: Material Overindulgence; Structural Overindulgence; Relational Overindulgence (Bredehoft, Clarke, Dawson, & Walcheski, 2004). The definition of parenting sense of competence includes parenting self-esteem which encompasses both perceived self efficacy as a parent and the satisfaction derived from parenting (Johnston & Mash, 1989). Parenting style is a pattern of attitudes that parents express toward their children. These include: *authoritative parents* respect individuality, have high expectations, and attend to being consistent, affectionate, responsive, and supportive; *authoritarian parents* exercise firm control over their children and set strict rigid standards of conduct; and *permissive parents* demonstrate minimal authority and control over their children and fail to define appropriate limits and standards of acceptable behavior (Baumrind, 1989, 1991; Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen & Hart, 1995).

The sample consisted of 528 parents (54.2% female, 45.8% male; ages 20-79; Mean age 40.2) from 46 different states and 7 countries. Participants entered the study by logging onto the study's web page (Bredehoft, Clarke, & Dawson, 2006). Participants answered 125 questions consisting of demographic data and three psychological scales.

Results

We found that the more parents overindulged their children, the more likely their parenting styles tended to be authoritarian and permissive not authoritative. In addition, parents who overindulged their children lacked a global sense of competence about their parenting, parental efficacy, and parenting satisfaction. Several questions help illuminate these general findings.

- Is there a relationship between parental overindulgence and the *authoritarian parenting style*? Yes, specifically the verbal and hostile interactions and non-reasoning/punitive strategies are associated with overindulgence. For example: "I yell or shout when our child misbehaves;" and "I punish by taking privileges away from our child with little if any explanation."
- Is there a relationship between parental overindulgence and the *permissive parenting style*? Yes, specifically a lack of follow-through, ignoring misbehavior, and lack of parental self-confidence is associated with overindulgence. For example: "I state punishments to our child and do not actually do them;" "I allow our child to annoy someone else;" and "I am afraid that disciplining our child for misbehavior will cause the child to not like his/her parents."
- Is there a relationship between parental overindulgence and the *authoritative parenting style*? No, specifically reasoning/induction and democratic participation are

not associated with overindulgence. For example: “I explain the consequences of the child’s behavior” and “I take our child’s desires into account before asking the child to do something.”

- Is there a relationship between parental overindulgence and parent sense of competence? Yes, specifically a lower sense of parenting efficacy and lack of parenting satisfaction is associated with overindulgence. For example: “I meet my own personal expectations for expertise in caring for my child” and “I do not know why it is, but sometimes when I’m supposed to be in control, I feel more like the one being manipulated.”

Implications

Implications for parent and family life educators include (1) identifying overindulgence and the parenting styles associated with it; (2) remain attentive to normative and non-normative life transitions and stressors; (3) provide information and alternatives to corporal punishment through a variety of sources; and (4) guide parents toward authoritative parenting styles.

Specific objectives for parents:

- give expectations regarding behavior before children engage in an activity;
- give reasons why rules should be obeyed;
- help children understand the impact of their behavior;
- talk and reason with children when misbehavior occurs; and
- emphasize the reasons for rules.

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Walcheski, M., & Bredehoft, D. (2010). [*Exploring the relationship between overindulgence and parenting styles*](#). Poster presented at the 2010 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, November 5, 2010, Minneapolis, Minneapolis, MN.