

# Effect of Perceived Parenting Styles on Cognitive Flexibility Among Young Adults

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**Abstract:** Central theme of this study was to check the effect of perceived parenting styles on cognitive flexibility among young adults. The sample (n = 380) was calculated using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, with a mean age range of 18-25 years, recruited from different universities in Peshawar. The instruments used were The Perceived Parenting Style Scale (PPSS) and The Cognitive Flexibility Scale (CFS). one-way ANOVA, Descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test, stepwise regression analysis and Pearson product-moment correlation were used. The outcome of t-test revealed no significant gender differences in cognitive flexibility ( $p > .05$ ). The one-way ANOVA revealed that young adults with authoritative parenting styles had higher cognitive flexibility ( $p < .01$ ) compared to those with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Stepwise regression analysis indicated that authoritative parenting significantly predicted cognitive flexibility ( $p < .001$ ). The present study highlights the importance of parenting styles in enhancing cognitive flexibility, suggesting that mental health professionals should focus on parenting interventions.

**Key words:** Perceived Parenting Styles, Cognitive Flexibility, Young Adults, CFS, Krejcie.

## INTRODUCTION

In shaping children's development parenting styles play a crucial role, with parents being vital to their growth and preparation for adulthood (Khanum et al., 2023). The manner through which parents nurture their children, referred to as parenting style, has a profound and enduring influence. The attitudes and behaviors that define this style are essential for fostering a child's cognitive and emotional abilities, with impacts that can extend well into early adulthood (Ren and Zhu, 2022).

Specifically, perceived parenting style is defined as an individual's subjective appraisal about the parenting style of one's parents. Moreover, the child's perception about their parents and their treatment (Hashmi et al., 2023; Stavroulaki et al., 2021). Perception of parenting styles by children regarding his / her parents are explained as set of behaviors and names which apply on all different varieties of styles of rules and regulations, care and brought up encouragement, and acceptance used during child-rearing (Garbe et al., 2020). These perceptions quite considerably affect the core factors, like cognitive flexibility that are important for providing young adults with the ability to effectively adapt and navigate complex social and academics environments.

Since Baumrind (1966) published three prototypic parenting styles, namely permissive (indulgent), authoritarian and authoritative, focused on demandingness and responsiveness, parenting styles have been well-established evident facts and widely known that the parenting have numerous effects of psychological and behavioral consequences (Pinquart, 2017a; Goagoses et al., 2022; Heynen et al., 2021; Pinquart, 2017b).

Authoritative parents cultivate a strong and supportive bond with their children. They set high standards and rules, and they clarify the reasons behind their disciplinary measures. Authoritative parents develop confidence, responsibility, and self-regulation in children. Such children better regulate their negative emotions and, therefore, have better social outcomes and emotional well-being (Masud et al., 2019).

However, authoritarian parents communicate in a one-way approach: they set up strict rules, and the child has no say or negotiating capacity regarding the rules. Rarely do they explain them to the child; children have high expectations with little scope for error. Punishment for the mistakes is very common. Authoritarian parents have relatively fewer nurturing behaviors as their expectations are very high and have little room for error (Masud et al., 2019). Children of authoritarian parents are likely to be well-behaved due to the consequences of misbehavior. However, it can also lead to a higher level of aggression, and children may also be shy, socially incompetent, & not able to make their own decisions (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2022).

Furthermore, permissive parents are usually warm and supporting, with little expectations towards their children. They maintain open communication and force few rules with children in order to allow them to make decisions independently. Usually, such children have fair social skills and good self-esteem. Though, they can be demanding, impulsive,

self-centered, & struggle with self-regulation (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2022).

### **Cognitive Flexibility**

In today's world, people need to be able to think and act in flexible ways. This means they must constantly learn, come up with new ideas for tricky issues, and keep going even when things get tough in ever-changing conditions. Bonnici (2020) explained that cognitive flexibility is the skill of getting used to new or surprising events, changing between different activities, and considering different points of view. Also, cognitive flexibility is seen as the capability to transition to new circumstances, resourcefully discover ways of resolving predicaments inventively, discern existing choices, utilize them eagerly, assess through control methods, and feel competent in these areas (Buğa et al., 2018). It is an essential condition that research shows influences a person's ability to get accustomed to evolving settings and actions aimed at achieving specific objectives (Gabrys et al., 2018). Construct of cognitive flexibility is underpinned by three core components: (1) the cognitive awareness of potential alternatives and strategies, particularly under stress; (2) the behavioral and motivational readiness to shift one's approach in response to dynamic conditions; and (3) the self-efficacy to confidently execute these adaptations. (Wolff et al., 2017). It is highly linked with the abilities of problem-solving skills, communication skills, and adaptability. People having cognitive flexibility are supposed to handle novel and demanding situations effectively, construct alternative thought processes and ideas, and adapt to novel circumstances (Arslan and Türk, 2022). According to research, Such people are having a sense of responsibility, strong communication skills & sociability (Rezaei & Jafari, 2023; Lan, 2022; Ghazanfari & Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2022). Such people are also able to develop new ways of coping, replace their negative thoughts with positive thoughts & to consider difficult situations as less burdensome (Arslan & Türk, 2022).

### **Parenting Styles and Cognitive Flexibility**

Researchers have found a connection between parenting practices and children's cognitive flexibility. Parenting style—expressed through different levels of parental control—reflects how caregivers help children manage impulses and adjust both emotionally and cognitively (Argyriou et al., 2016). These emotional and cognitive aspects of parenting together foster the psychological skills children need for healthy development (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). From the social learning perspective, family socialization works through parents' modeling and reinforcement, which shape children's developmental

trajectories (Pomerantz & Thompson, 2008). By imitating parental behavior, children gradually form complex psychological capacities—such as emotional competence and cognitive complexity—that later shape their actions (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). For instance, when parents use authoritative methods that balance demands with reasoned guidance, children tend to become more emotionally sensitive and cognitively adaptable. Conversely, overly strict, inflexible parenting that provides little explanation or support can undermine children’s subjective well-being because it limits opportunities for them to learn effective emotional and cognitive strategies through observation (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

### **Authoritative Parenting and Cognitive Flexibility**

According to Williams et al., (2012), parenting that children perceive as warm and democratic i.e., authoritative is associated with more cognitive flexibility. Furthermore, affectionate and caring conversation between parents & children has been shown to enhance adult children’s cognitive flexibility (Curran & Andersen, 2017). Additionally, research has shown that children who are conversationally sensitive are able to voluntarily divert their attention and thought pattern in order to detect implicit messages and alternative information in discussions. The parent-child interaction and ongoing reciprocity in authoritative parenting conversations may facilitate children imitating conversational sensitivity with their parents. Through discussion & communicating with parents, children are capable to comprehend that various viewpoints do exist, as well as learn to compromise & settle their own beliefs based on the ideas of others. As a result of these experiences, they become more adaptive in thinking & flexible that could help them adjust to life (Wu et al., 2020).

### **Authoritarian Parenting and Cognitive Flexibility**

Adolescents perceive parenting as coercive or authoritarian is linked with lower cognitive flexibility (Williams et al., 2012). Likewise, research has shown that less supportive parenting styles, such as those providing less support; guidance & support, weaken one’s ability to deal with issues in a flexible manner and reduce their use of effective self-regulation, which leads to maladjustment (Rabinowitz et al., 2016). Moreover, it has been shown that cognitive flexibility has a negative relationship with verbal aggressiveness and is positively related to tolerance of disagreement. Authoritarian parents’ strict discipline and lack of tolerance for mistakes might be inversely related to children’s cognitive flexibility. Such parenting behavior emphasizes absolute compliance that restricts the thinking of the children. They would learn inflexible beliefs about parental norms & expectations without

considering alternative possibilities. As a result, this becomes difficult for them to adapt to the new, diverse, and ever-changing mode of life as well as to the surrounding environment (Wu et al., 2020).

### **Permissive Parenting and Cognitive Flexibility**

Prior research has shown that permissive parenting that is complimented by low control but high warmth, significantly predicted certain aspects of psychological flexibility, like present-moment awareness & acceptance, in adolescence. This suggested that children raised in permissive environments may develop better adherence to values due to parental warmth and understanding. However, it also has been noted that lack of structure could impair self-regulation, which is critical for cognitive flexibility (Bibi et al., 2021). Moreso, Chipman et al. (2000) found that permissive parenting style lead to poor self-regulation among children. They reported that while permissive parents are warm and accepting, the lack of appropriate boundaries can hinder the growth of child's self-regulatory & flexible thinking skills.

### **Objectives**

1. To analyze the difference of score in cognitive flexibility in male and female among university students.
2. To examine the difference in the mean score of authoritarian; authoritative; & permissive parenting among university students on cognitive flexibility.
3. To assess effect of parenting style on cognitive flexibility among university students.

### **Hypotheses**

1. Cognitive flexibility will be more in male students as compared to female students of university.
2. Students with authoritative parenting style will score high on cognitive flexibility than students with permissive & permissive parenting styles.
3. Authoritative parenting style will predict more cognitive flexibility than permissive & authoritarian parenting styles.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

The target population for this study comprised (N=3,986) young adults from three public universities in Peshawar, establishing a finite sampling frame. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula was used to determine a minimum sample (n=351), with a 95% confidence interval

and 5% margin of error. While a simple random sampling technique was applied to select participants from various departments—aiming to mitigate selection bias and enhance external validity—it is critical to note that the generalizability of the findings is inherently constrained by the geographical and institutional specificity of the population. The final sample ( $n = 380$ ) was delimited to individuals aged 18-25 to maintain developmental homogeneity.

## **Instruments**

### **Demographic Sheet**

The self-constructed demographic sheet included all the relevant information regarding the participant's age, gender, education, family system, and socioeconomic status.

### **Perceived Parenting Style Scale**

PPSS was developed by Divya and Manikandan (2013) to assesses a child's perception of their parents' behavior across three domains: permissive; authoritative & authoritarian. This 30-item instrument utilizes a 5-point Likert scale, where responses range from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The scale's reliability, determined by Cronbach's alpha, was found to be acceptable for all subscales: authoritative ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ), authoritarian ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ), and permissive ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ). The authors report that the scale possesses face validity.

### **Cognitive Flexibility Scale**

CFS was prepared by Martin and Rubin (1995) to determine willingness to adapt to new situations; self-efficacy in being flexible; & an individual's awareness of alternative solutions. It assesses the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as cognitively flexible in their thinking and behavior. The scale consists of 12 items, and it uses a 6-point Likert Scale, with response options ranging from Strongly Agree (6) to Strongly Disagree (1). Some of the items are reverse-scored to reduce response bias. The total score is obtained by reversing the scores of negatively worded items and summing all the item scores. High score indicates greater level of cognitive flexibility. The internal consistency of the scale is 0.76.

## **Procedure**

To initiate the study, a written permission letter was submitted to the Directors of Admissions of different universities of Peshawar, KP. After getting formal approval, access was allowed to departmental lists, which facilitated the initiation of the sampling process.

After obtaining the lists, different departments within each university were randomly selected. Based on the overall population size

of the selected departments, a sample size was calculated through Krejcie & Morgan formula for sample size determination. After selection of the departments and calculation of sample, permission was taken from the Heads of Departments (HODs) through a formal permission letter. The permission letter describes the study's aims and requested authorization to approach students for participation.

After getting consent from the HODs, students were selected using a Simple Random Sampling Technique. Participants were informed with a purpose of this study and that the data collected will only be used for research that will remain confidential. Standardized questionnaires were then administered to the selected students. They were given enough time for questionnaire completion, during which the researcher remained available to answer any questions or offer clarification as needed. Appreciation was extended to all participants upon completion of their participation in the study.

## Results

**Table 1** Socio-Demographic Characteristic of the Participants (n=380)

Sample Characteristics	N	Percentage %
Age		
18-21	285	75.0
22-25	95	25.0
Gender		
Male	190	50.0
Female	190	50.0
Education		
2nd Semester	81	21.3
4th Semester	110	28.9
6th Semester	101	26.6
8th Semester	88	23.2
Family System		
Nuclear	256	67.4
Joint	124	32.6
Socioeconomic Status		
Lower	29	7.6
Middle	314	82.6
Upper	37	9.7

**Table 2** Psychometric Properties of Major Study Variables

Variables	No. of Items	M	SD	Range	A
PPSS	30	85.1	11.3	64-11	.65
CFS	12	48.1	13.4	12-70	.91

NOTE: PPSS= Perceived Parenting Style Scale, CFS= Cognitive Flexibility Scale

Table 2 displays the reliability and validity information for the major study variables. The Perceived Parenting Style Scale (M=85.1, SD=11.3) showed average reliability with cronbach alpha of .65 & consisted of 30 items, while the Cognitive Flexibility Scale (M=48.1, SD=13.4) have excellent reliability with cronbach alpha of .91 & composed of 12 items.

**Table 3** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation of the Study Variables

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2
PPS	380	85.1	11.3	1	
CF	380	48.1	13.4	-.38**	1

Note: PPS= Perceived Parenting Styles, CF= Cognitive Flexibility

Table 3 shows Pearson Product moment correlation among Perceived Parenting Styles & cognitive flexibility. Result showed that PPS have significant but negative correlation with cognitive flexibility ( $r = -.381$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 4** Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-Value of Cognitive Flexibility in Gender (n=380)

Variables	Male M	SD	Female M	SD	t (190)	P	Cohen's d
CF	48.34	15.2	48.03	11.55	.227	$p > .05$	.023

Note: CF= Cognitive Flexibility

The table have shown the result of Independent Sample t-test. The result shows no significant gender differences on cognitive flexibility.

**Table 5** Mean, Standard Deviation, and t- Value of Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive Parenting on Cognitive flexibility

Variables	Authoritative		Authoritarian		Permissive		F(2,376)	$\eta^2$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
CF	51.99	10.9	34.3	10.8	32.5	15.65	81.55***	0.30

Note: CF= Cognitive Flexibility

ANOVA was conducted to determine if the different parenting styles could lead to cognitive flexibility. The finding reveals that authoritative parenting increases cognitive flexibility in children in contrast to permissive & authoritarian parenting style. Value of ( $\eta^2 = 0.30$ ) ( $\alpha = .05$ ) which indicates large effect size. The post hoc comparison indicates

significant group mean difference among permissive, authoritarian & authoritative parenting styles.

**Table 6** Stepwise Regression of Parenting Styles on Cognitive Flexibility

	Variables	B	95% CI		SE	B	R2	ΔR2
			LL	UL				
Step 1	Constant	8.29	4.48	12.0	1.93			
	Authoritative	1.09	.995	1.19	.052	.739	.546	.546***
Step 2	Constant	26.12	18.09	34.15	4.08			
	Authoritative	.846	.706	.986	.071	.571	.574	.027***
	Permissive	-.367	-.513	-.220	.075	-.236		
Step 3	Constant	20.73	11.24	30.23	4.89			
	Authoritative	.928	.768	1.08	.081	.626	.579	.005*
	Permissive	-.457	-.627	-.288	.086	-.295		
	Authoritarian	.183	.009	.357	.088	.126		

Note: Constant= Cognitive flexibility,  $p < .001$

Table 6 indicates the results of step wise regression of effect of parenting on cognitive flexibility in young adults. The result of model 1 indicates that Authoritative Parenting Style significantly & positively predicted cognitive flexibility ( $\beta = 8.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ). While in Model 2 Permissive Parenting Style significantly but negatively predicted cognitive flexibility ( $\beta = -.367$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In Model 3 Authoritative Parenting Style strongly predicted cognitive flexibility: Permissive Parenting Style is strong negative predictor of cognitive flexibility. While Authoritarian Parenting Style is weak but positive predictor of cognitive flexibility ( $\beta = .183$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Purpose of this study was to examine the effect of gender differences on cognitive flexibility & to investigate the effect of perceived parenting styles on cognitive flexibility among young adults.

The first hypothesis of this study is that Cognitive flexibility will be more in male students as compared to female students of university. However, the results of the current study did not support this hypothesis, as the independent sample t-test revealed no significant difference in cognitive flexibility between male and female students. This result is consistent with a number of empirical studies that reported no or little gender differences in executive functioning, especially in cognitive flexibility during adolescence or early adulthood.

In a study conducted by Artawijaya and Supratiwi in 2024, the researchers explored the cognitive flexibility differences between genders within the adolescent population of Indonesia. The study

revealed that the average cognitive flexibility score for male students was marginally greater compared to that of female students, although this difference did not reach statistical significance. The outcomes of their research suggested that while gender could potentially impact various other psychological aspects such as resilience, its impact on cognitive flexibility during this specific stage of development might not be substantial.

Johnco et al. (2012) also did a study to look at how older people change their thinking, and they noticed that how well someone's brain worked as they aged and how much they repeated the same thoughts were more important than whether they were male or female when it came to being able to adapt. They discovered that there might be small differences between men and women in some brain tasks, but these differences don't really matter when testing how well someone can adapt. This suggests that things like how healthy someone's brain is or what kind of person they are might affect their ability to adapt more than whether they are male or female. The next idea was that children whose parents use a fair but firm approach will do better on tests of thinking skills than children whose parents are either too strict or too easygoing." The study's outcomes agreed with this idea, because the numbers from the test showed real differences among the three parenting styles when it comes to how well kids think. The numbers showed that children who saw their parents as fair, but firm did much better on tests of thinking skills than those who saw their parents as either too strict or too easygoing. These differences in the group averages were big enough to matter.

Similarly, the step-by-step analysis showed that authoritative parenting strongly and positively determined cognitive flexibility at the start. After putting in permissive and authoritarian parenting methods in the next steps, authoritative parenting was still a key and lasting determinant. Permissive parenting showed a considerable negative determination, while authoritarian parenting had a slight but positive determining impact on cognitive flexibility. These results line up with earlier studies that show the basics. Even though it matters, how parents act when raising their kids and how it affects their thinking and growth needs to be looked at more closely, not just as a set path; how it works depends on a child's nature, their family's money situation, and what the general culture says is "good" parenting. (Aremu et al., 2018; Szkody et al., 2020). For example, Mu and Motevalli (2025) studied the link between supportive parenting and flexible thinking and found that the main parts of this style—being loving and giving clear rules—don't just cause things to happen but help start a certain way of growing. This way focuses on and practices thinking skills like changing and

managing oneself, which teaches kids to think in a way that is flexible and planned. Also, how supportive parenting helps with handling feelings seems to work through two main ways: helping kids believe they can learn and improve, and teaching them to rethink situations. These results show that parents' help is a key thing that gives kids the thinking and feeling skills they need to do well when things are new or hard (Liu et al., 2019).

Also, Mu and Motevalli (2025) discovered a weak positive link that was not statistically meaningful between strict parenting and the ability to think flexibly. These results imply that even though strict parenting wasn't a key indicator, its small positive connection implies some cultural settings exist where a well-organized but less caring parenting style could still help boost flexible thought to some extent. Different from what the regression analysis showed in this study, Rabinowitz et al. (2016) discovered that when teens view parenting as strict, like parents offering less motivation, care, and direction, it reduces the teen's ability to handle problems flexibly and makes them less able to effectively manage themselves. Also, a study by Bibi et al. (2021) showed that the permissive way of raising kids greatly pointed to certain parts of how well their minds could adapt, like how well the young people accepted things and controlled themselves. This means that young people with permissive parents are better at handling their feelings and have stronger values because their parents work with them, understand them, and are children. But, what this study says doesn't match what we found in our study, where the permissive parenting style really seemed to hurt how well people could think flexibly. This might mean that even though kids with permissive parents might get better at controlling their emotions and feel good about themselves, not having enough rules could make it hard for them to control themselves and make choices (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2022).

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the current study are;

1. The sample was taken only from university students in Peshawar, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations, including non-university young adults or those from different sociocultural backgrounds.

2. The present study has explored the effect of only three parenting styles, excluding the uninvolved/neglectful parenting style, which is an essential dimension in the full typology of parenting and could have enriched the analysis.

3. The study did not assess maternal and paternal parenting styles separately, making it difficult to determine which parental figure had a more significant impact.

4. The instruments used in the current study were psychometrically reliable but were originally developed in western contexts. These may not fully capture culturally specific parenting practices or behaviors in a South Asian context.

### **Future Research Directions**

In light of the limitations in the present study, the following directions are recommended for future studies:

1. Future studies should include large and more diverse samples across various regions, educational levels, and cultural backgrounds to improve the generalizability of the study.

2. The uninvolved/neglectful parenting style should be integrated into future studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of all parenting typologies.

3. Future research should conduct a separate analysis of maternal and paternal parenting styles to identify differential effects on cognitive flexibility.

4. Future research should adapt or validate the existing scales for the specific cultural context to ensure relevance and accuracy in non-Western populations.

### **Implications**

Based on the findings of the current study, we came to know that perceived parenting styles significantly influence the development of cognitive flexibility among young adults. Among today's youth, those who perceived their parents as authoritarian or neglectful tend to struggle with adaptive thinking and emotional regulation.

These deficits in cognitive flexibility are manifesting in various forms, including poor academic performance, relationship difficulties, and decision-making impairments. The lack of adaptive problem-solving skills is also pushing many young individuals toward self-centered behavior, social withdrawal, and even anti-social tendencies in some cases.

One of the significant findings is that individuals who perceived their parents as authoritative (warm yet structured) showed better flexibility in thinking and constructive conflict resolution. On the contrary, inconsistent or harsh parenting was linked to rigidity in thought patterns.

In light of these findings, this study recommends early psychoeducational interventions focused on parenting practices, particularly targeting new and future parents. Promoting authoritative parenting can serve as a protective factor against cognitive maladaptation in youth. At the same time, integrating cognitive flexibility training in school and university settings can reinforce these skills in individuals who may not have experienced optimal parenting.

Teachers, counselors, and mental health professionals can use these insights to tailor guidance programs and training modules that build problem-solving abilities, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution skills in young adults. Family-based therapies, parental training programs, and campus counseling initiatives should emphasize the long-term impact of parenting styles on mental health and cognitive development.

In the long-term, these interventions can help reduce interpersonal conflicts, impulsive behavior, and social dysfunction in educational environments. Enhancing cognitive flexibility can also contribute to a more harmonious society by nurturing responsible, empathetic, and emotionally balanced adults.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study substantiate the significant role of perceived parenting style as a determinant of cognitive flexibility in young adulthood. Specifically, an authoritative parenting style—characterized by emotional warmth, responsiveness, and appropriate structure—emerged as a robust positive predictor, effectively fostering the adaptive cognitive capacities required to navigate complex situations. In contrast, authoritarian and permissive styles, defined by excessive control and a lack of consistent discipline, respectively, were found to be less conducive to this critical developmental outcome. These results carry salient implications for applied practice. In clinical, educational, and familial contexts, they underscore the potential utility of psychoeducational initiatives designed to promote authoritative parenting principles, thereby enhancing young adults' cognitive adaptability and resilience. To build upon this research, future studies should prioritize longitudinal designs to elucidate causal pathways. Further investigation should also expand the scope by incorporating neglected parenting styles (e.g., uninvolved parenting), disaggregating maternal and paternal influences, and examining these dynamics within more diverse cultural and socioeconomic populations to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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