

Parenting Styles and Adolescent Self-Esteem: A Qualitative Study Across Government and Private School Contexts

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Abstract—Adolescence is a pivotal developmental phase where self-esteem, an individual's overall evaluation of their worth, is significantly shaped by the family environment. This qualitative study explored adolescents' perceptions of parenting styles and their subsequent impact on self-esteem within government and private school contexts. Using a sample of 180 adolescents (ages 13–17), data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed via thematic analysis. The findings identified four key themes: parental warmth and emotional support, strict parenting and fear of judgment, autonomy development, and gender-based perceptual differences. Results indicated that authoritative parenting, characterized by high warmth and autonomy support, was strongly associated with higher self-esteem and confidence. Conversely, authoritarian practices, more frequently reported by government school students, were linked to emotional distance and reduced self-worth. Gender differences were also evident, with girls prioritizing emotional validation and boys emphasizing independence. These findings underscore the critical role of supportive family dynamics and suggest that school-based parental guidance programs could effectively foster healthy adolescent psychological development.

Keywords: adolescence, parenting styles, self-esteem, qualitative research, school context, gender differences.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage marked by rapid psychological, emotional, and social changes. During this period, individuals gradually develop a clearer sense of identity, autonomy, and self-worth. One of the most important psychological constructs that emerges during adolescence is self-esteem, which refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their worth and value (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' emotional well-being, social relationships, academic motivation, and resilience when facing challenges. Adolescents with healthy levels of self-esteem often demonstrate greater confidence, stronger coping abilities, and more adaptive social behaviors. In contrast, low self-esteem has been associated with various psychological difficulties, including anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and academic disengagement (Orth & Robins, 2014). Because self-esteem develops through interactions with significant social agents, the family environment, particularly parenting practices, plays a central role in shaping how adolescents perceive themselves.

Among the various influences within the family environment, parenting styles have received considerable attention in developmental and educational psychology. Parenting styles refer to the consistent patterns of attitudes, behaviors, and emotional responses that parents use when interacting with their children (Baumrind, 1967). These styles reflect the balance between parental warmth, responsiveness, control, and expectations placed upon children. Baumrind initially identified three primary parenting styles, authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, which were later expanded to include neglectful or uninvolved parenting (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Each style reflects a distinct approach to discipline, emotional communication, and

autonomy granting. Authoritative parenting combines high responsiveness with reasonable expectations and supportive guidance. Authoritarian parenting emphasizes strict discipline and obedience with limited emotional warmth. Permissive parenting involves warmth but limited control, while neglectful parenting reflects minimal involvement and supervision.

Research across cultures consistently indicates that parenting styles significantly influence adolescents' psychological development and self-concept. Authoritative parenting has generally been associated with the most positive developmental outcomes. Adolescents raised in authoritative families tend to report higher self-esteem, stronger emotional regulation, and greater academic competence (Steinberg, 2001). This parenting style promotes open communication, emotional validation, and appropriate independence, allowing adolescents to develop a stronger sense of competence and self-worth. In contrast, authoritarian parenting, characterized by rigid rules and punitive discipline, may limit adolescents' opportunities for self-expression and autonomy. Studies have shown that adolescents exposed to highly authoritarian environments often report lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019). Similarly, permissive and neglectful parenting may hinder the development of self-regulation and internal confidence due to inconsistent guidance or lack of parental engagement.

Self-esteem is not a static trait but a dynamic construct shaped through social experiences and feedback from significant others. According to sociometer theory, self-esteem functions as an internal indicator of social acceptance and belonging (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). During adolescence, parental attitudes, communication patterns, and emotional support become particularly influential in shaping how young individuals evaluate their abilities and personal value. Warm and supportive parenting environments help adolescents feel respected, understood, and valued, thereby strengthening their self-esteem and identity development. Conversely, parenting characterized by excessive criticism, emotional distance, or lack of communication may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Understanding adolescents' perceptions of parenting practices is therefore essential for examining the development of self-esteem during this stage of life.

In addition to parenting styles, broader institutional and socio-cultural contexts may influence adolescents' experiences within the family environment. Educational settings, such as government and private schools, often reflect differences in socioeconomic background, parental expectations, and family resources. These contextual factors may indirectly shape parenting approaches and adolescents' perceptions of parental support (Bornstein, 2012). Furthermore, gender socialization can influence how adolescents interpret and respond to parenting behaviors. Research suggests that girls often value emotional support and validation, whereas boys may emphasize autonomy and independence in parental relationships (Milevsky et al., 2007). These differences highlight the importance of examining parenting styles within specific social and institutional contexts.

The present study aims to explore the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent self-esteem within the context of government and private schools. By adopting a qualitative approach, the study seeks to understand how adolescents perceive parental warmth, discipline, autonomy, and emotional support, and how these experiences influence their sense of self-worth. Additionally, the study examines gender differences in adolescents' perceptions of parenting and self-esteem development. Investigating these dynamics across different school contexts may provide deeper insight into how family practices and institutional environments interact to shape adolescent psychological outcomes.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

II.1. PARENTING STYLES AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Parenting styles are widely recognized as a key factor influencing adolescents' psychological and emotional development. Recent research has increasingly focused on how parental warmth, discipline, and responsiveness shape adolescents' mental health and social adjustment. Parenting styles represent patterns of parental attitudes and behaviors that guide children's development through control, support, and emotional interaction. Studies suggest that parenting characterized by warmth and structured guidance promotes healthier psychological outcomes among adolescents (Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2019). In contrast, parenting practices involving excessive control, emotional distance, or inconsistent discipline may contribute to anxiety, behavioral difficulties, and emotional instability.

Recent research continues to highlight the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent mental health across cultural contexts. Authoritative parenting, which combines responsiveness with moderate control, has been shown to promote emotional competence and adaptive coping skills (García & Serra, 2019; Martínez et al., 2020). Similarly, parental warmth and effective communication significantly contribute to adolescents' social competence and emotional resilience (Cui & Conger, 2008). Studies also indicate that supportive parenting protects adolescents from mental health risks, whereas negative parenting styles are associated with psychological distress and maladjustment (Roustit et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2025). Parenting styles further influence adolescents' behavioral adjustment, academic performance, and emotional well-being (Wang et al., 2024; Banu, 2025). Moreover, parenting behaviors characterized by criticism, rejection, or harsh discipline have been linked with increased vulnerability to emotional problems among adolescents (Kong et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025). Together, these findings emphasize that parenting styles remain a central environmental influence on adolescent psychological development.

II.II. PARENTING STYLES AND ADOLESCENT SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is a central psychological construct during adolescence, reflecting individuals' evaluation of their own worth and social value. Family interactions play an important role in shaping adolescents' self-perceptions. Research consistently demonstrates that parenting styles characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and supportive communication are positively associated with adolescents' self-esteem and psychological adjustment (Pandey, 2023; Gul et al., 2024; Khadka et al., 2025).

Studies have shown that authoritative parenting, characterized by high warmth and clear expectations, remains a strong predictor of healthy self-esteem among school-going adolescents in both urban and rural settings (Chauhan et al., 2023; Krishnapriya et al., 2026). Longitudinal evidence suggests that parental warmth acts as an interpersonal protective factor that helps adolescents cope with psychological stress (Arslan, 2018). Conversely, authoritarian parenting practices have been associated with increased vulnerability to anxiety and lower levels of self-worth (Vijay et al., 2022). Some studies have also explored how parenting affects related psychological traits such as cognitive flexibility, which helps adolescents adapt to complex social environments (Peng et al., 2021; Mu, 2025).

II.III. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PARENTING AND SELF-ESTEEM

Gender identity and social expectations influence how adolescents interpret parental behavior. Research conducted in India suggests that boys and girls may perceive parenting practices differently. For example, female adolescents often report higher self-esteem when they perceive supportive parenting, although they may also be more sensitive to evaluative feedback and parental rejection (Deshmukh, 2024). International studies similarly indicate that girls are more sensitive to parental social comparison behaviors, which can influence fluctuations in self-esteem (Liu et al., 2025). In contrast, boys often interpret strict discipline as a challenge to their autonomy, though it may not reduce self-esteem unless accompanied by a lack of emotional warmth (Kour & Rani, 2018). Recent findings suggest that these gendered patterns continue to persist, with girls emphasizing emotional connection and boys valuing independence in parent-child relationships (Sharma & Patil, 2023).

II.IV. SCHOOL CONTEXT, SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND, AND PARENTING

Adolescents' experiences of parenting are also shaped by broader socioeconomic and institutional contexts. Families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often emphasize autonomy and communication, whereas families experiencing economic stress may adopt more inconsistent or authoritarian parenting practices (Conger, 2011).

Research involving school-going adolescents in regions such as Delhi-NCR and Kerala suggests that supportive parenting contributes to improved academic engagement and psychological resilience (Khushi et al., 2024). However, some recent studies indicate that even within authoritative households, high academic expectations may sometimes create pressure that negatively affects adolescents' self-esteem (Ahmad & Ojha, 2025). These findings highlight the importance of understanding parenting practices within the broader cultural and educational contexts of adolescents' lives.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To explore adolescents' perceptions of different parenting styles.
2. To examine the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent self-esteem.
3. To understand how parental warmth, discipline, and emotional support influence adolescents' self-concept.
4. To identify differences in parenting experiences among adolescents studying in government and private schools.
5. To examine gender differences in adolescents' perceptions of parenting practices and their influence on self-esteem.

IV. METHOD

IV.I. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to examine adolescents' perceptions of parenting styles and their influence on self-esteem. Qualitative approaches are appropriate for understanding individuals' experiences, meanings, and interpretations of social interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since parenting practices are often interpreted subjectively by adolescents, a qualitative design allowed for deeper exploration of how these experiences shape adolescents' perceptions of themselves. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which enabled participants to describe their experiences related to parental warmth, discipline, communication, and autonomy. These methods allowed participants to express their views openly while helping the researcher identify common themes regarding parenting practices and adolescent self-esteem.

IV.II. SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 180 adolescents aged 13–17 years, selected from government and private schools. Participants were equally distributed across the two institutional contexts, with 90 students from government schools and 90 students from private schools. Both boys and girls were included in order to explore possible gender differences in perceptions of parenting styles and self-esteem. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which allowed the researcher to recruit adolescents who could provide meaningful insights into their experiences of parental interaction and family dynamics.

IV.III. INCLUSION CRITERIA

Participants were included in the study if they:

1. Were aged 13–17 years.
2. Were currently enrolled in government or private schools.
3. Were living with at least one parent or caregiver.
4. Voluntarily agreed to participate and provided informed consent.

IV.IV. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Participants were excluded if they:

1. Were below 13 years or above 17 years of age.
2. Were not enrolled in school.
3. Were not living with parents or primary caregivers.
4. Did not provide consent or were unwilling to participate.

IV.V. PSYCHOLOGICAL MEASURES

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

- **Semi-Structured Interview Schedule:** A researcher-developed interview guide was used to explore adolescents' perceptions of parenting styles, parental warmth, discipline, communication patterns, and autonomy within the family.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Group discussions were conducted with students to understand shared experiences and collective perceptions regarding parental behavior and its influence on adolescents' confidence, emotional well-being, and self-esteem.
- **Self-Esteem Prompt Guide:** Open-ended prompts inspired by the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem framework** were used to encourage participants to reflect on their feelings of self-worth, confidence, and perceived parental support.

IV.VI. PROCEDURE

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the respective school authorities prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the research, and voluntary participation was emphasized. Adolescents who met the inclusion criteria and provided consent were selected for participation. Data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Hindi or English, depending on participants' preference. Individual interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore personal experiences of parenting styles and self-esteem, while focus group discussions were organized to capture shared perspectives and interactions among students. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes, and focus group discussions lasted around 30–40 minutes. With participants' consent, responses were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

IV.VII. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical principles were followed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the research before data collection. Informed consent was obtained from participants, and parental consent was obtained where necessary. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous, and no identifying information was included in the research report. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. All collected data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

IV.VIII. DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. All recorded responses were transcribed and carefully reviewed to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes related to parenting styles, emotional support, autonomy, and adolescents' perceptions of self-esteem. The coding process involved organizing participants' responses into thematic categories and interpreting the underlying meanings reflected in their narratives. Data collection and analysis were conducted iteratively, and data saturation was reached when no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews and discussions. The identified themes were further compared across school contexts (government and private schools) and gender groups in order to understand differences in adolescents' experiences of parenting practices and their influence on self-concept.

V. RESULTS

The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. Several recurring themes emerged from adolescents' narratives regarding parenting styles and their perceived influence on self-esteem. The key themes identified included parental warmth and emotional support, experiences of strict or judgmental parenting, autonomy and confidence development, and gender-based differences in perceptions of parenting practices. Differences were also observed across government and private school contexts.

V.I. THEME 1: PARENTAL WARMTH AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

A large number of adolescents emphasized that parental warmth, encouragement, and emotional support contributed positively to their self-confidence and emotional well-being. Students who described their parents as approachable and supportive reported feeling more comfortable sharing personal concerns and making independent decisions. Participants from private schools more frequently reported experiencing emotional openness and supportive communication with their parents. Girls particularly highlighted the importance of emotional reassurance and understanding within the family environment.

Table 1: Perceived Parental Warmth by School Type and Gender

School Type	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Government School	52	56
Private School	71	78

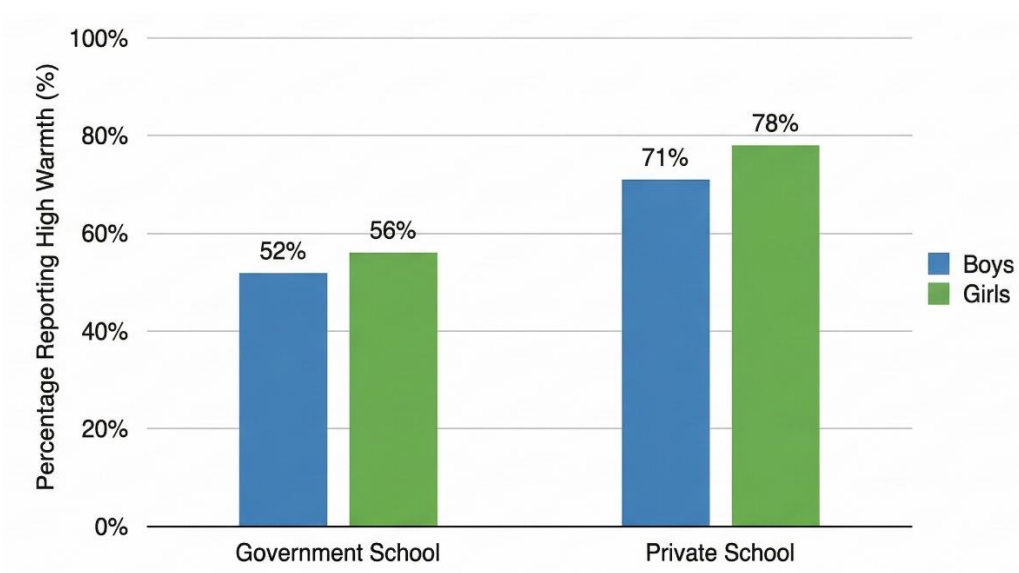


Figure 1: Perceived Parental Warmth Across School Contexts

V.II. THEME 2: STRICT PARENTING AND FEAR OF JUDGMENT

Another prominent theme that emerged from participants' responses was the experience of strict parental discipline and fear of judgment. Several adolescents described situations where parental expectations, criticism, or frequent scolding limited open communication within the family. Students from government schools reported slightly higher experiences of strict discipline and emotional distance compared to private school participants.

Table 2: Indicators of Authoritarian Parenting Across School Contexts

Parenting Indicator	Government School (%)	Private School (%)
Frequent scolding	64	36

Emotional distance	58	31
Avoidance of communication	49	34

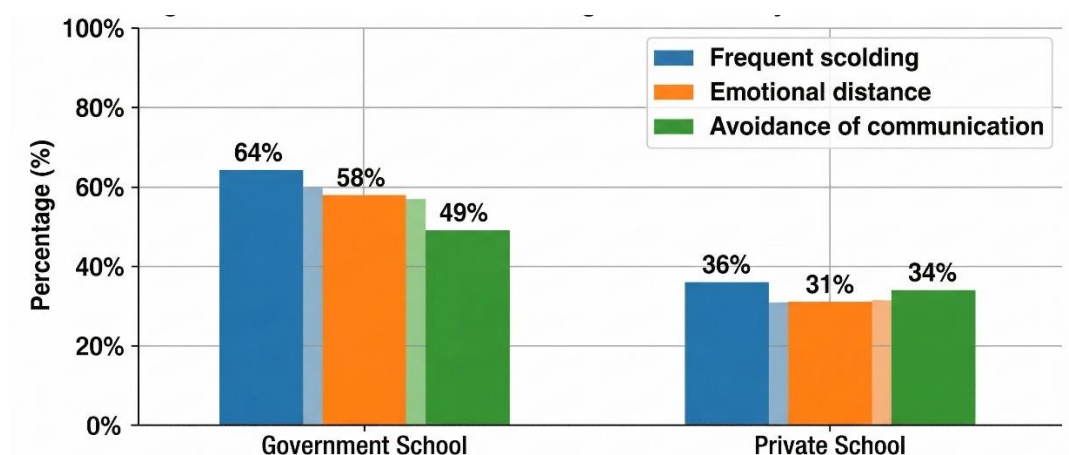


Figure 2: Authoritarian Parenting Indicators by School Context

V.III. THEME 3: AUTONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-ESTEEM

Autonomy and decision-making freedom emerged as another key theme influencing adolescents' self-esteem. Adolescents who reported that their parents encouraged independence and trusted them with responsibilities also described feeling more confident and capable.

Table 3: Autonomy and Self-Esteem Indicators by Parenting Style

Parenting Style	Decision-Making Autonomy (%)	Self-Esteem Expression (%)
Authoritative	83	88
Authoritarian	36	42
Permissive	61	65

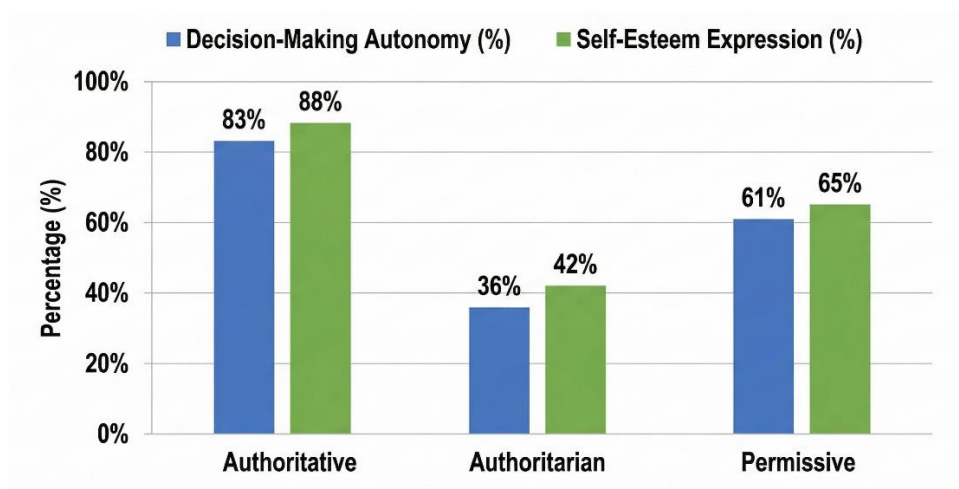


Figure 3: Autonomy and Self-Esteem Across Parenting Styles

V.IV. THEME 4: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING

Gender differences were also observed in adolescents' interpretations of parental behavior. Girls generally emphasized the importance of emotional support and encouragement, whereas boys more frequently highlighted issues related to independence and disagreements with parents.

Table 4: Gender Differences in Perceptions of Parenting Influence

Domain	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Emotional validation	51	73
Conflict with parents	59	44
Sense of independence	74	57

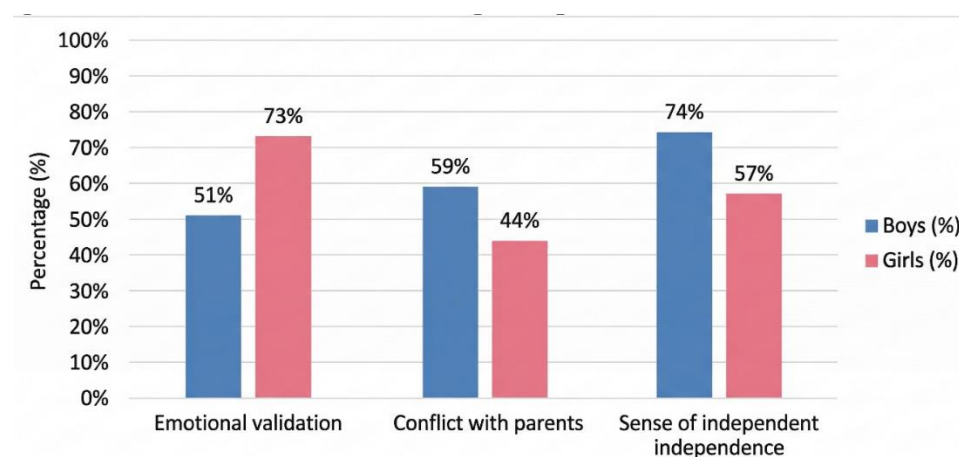


Figure 4: Gender Differences in Parenting Perceptions

VI. DISCUSSION

The present study explored adolescents' perceptions of parenting styles and their influence on self-esteem within government and private school contexts. The findings highlight the significant role of parental warmth, autonomy support, and disciplinary practices in shaping adolescents' perceptions of self-worth. The results also reveal differences related to school context and gender in how adolescents interpret parental behavior.

One of the major findings of the study was the importance of parental warmth and emotional support in promoting adolescents' self-esteem. Adolescents who described their parents as supportive, understanding, and communicative reported higher levels of confidence and emotional comfort. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that parental warmth and responsiveness are strongly associated with positive self-esteem and psychological well-being among adolescents (Boullion et al., 2023). Similarly, García and Serra (2024) found that adolescents raised in supportive and communicative family environments tend to develop stronger self-concepts and better social adjustment.

Another important theme that emerged was adolescents' experiences of strict parenting and fear of judgment, particularly among those who perceived their parents as highly controlling or critical. Participants who reported frequent scolding and limited communication with parents described lower emotional openness and hesitation in sharing personal concerns. These findings align with earlier studies suggesting that authoritarian parenting may restrict adolescents' autonomy and negatively affect their self-esteem (Anand & Singh, 2024).

The findings also highlighted the role of autonomy in shaping adolescents' confidence and self-expression. Adolescents who reported that their parents trusted them with decision-making and encouraged independence described stronger feelings of competence and self-worth. Such parenting practices provide adolescents with opportunities to develop independence while maintaining a supportive family environment.

Differences were also observed across school contexts, with private school participants more frequently reporting parental warmth and open communication compared to government school participants, who described relatively stricter parental expectations. These findings may reflect broader socioeconomic and contextual influences on parenting practices. Previous studies suggest that educational and socioeconomic contexts can influence parental communication styles, emotional availability, and disciplinary approaches (Ahmed, 2025).

Finally, the study identified gender differences in adolescents' perceptions of parenting practices. Girls emphasized the importance of emotional validation and encouragement from parents, whereas boys more frequently highlighted independence and occasional conflicts with parents. Overall, the findings support existing literature indicating that parenting styles characterized by warmth, communication, and autonomy support contribute positively to adolescents' self-esteem, whereas strict and controlling parenting practices may hinder adolescents' emotional expression and confidence.

VII. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. **Parenting awareness:** Encouraging warm, supportive, and communicative parenting can strengthen adolescents' self-esteem.
2. **School initiatives:** Schools can organize **parental guidance programs and workshops** to promote healthy parent-child relationships.
3. **Mental health support:** Counselors and educators can use these insights to support adolescents' **confidence and emotional well-being**.
4. **Gender-sensitive understanding:** Parents should recognize that boys and girls may interpret parenting behaviors differently.

Limitations and Future Directions

1. **Limited context:** The study focused on a specific region, which may limit generalizability.
2. **Qualitative approach:** The design explores perceptions but does not establish causal relationships.
3. **Self-reported data:** Findings are based on adolescents' subjective experiences.
4. **Future research:** Future studies may use **larger samples, mixed methods, or longitudinal designs** to further examine parenting and self-esteem dynamics.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study explored adolescents' perceptions of parenting styles and their relationship with self-esteem across government and private school contexts. The findings suggest that parenting characterized by warmth, emotional support, and autonomy encouragement is associated with more positive self-esteem among adolescents. In contrast, strict and less communicative parenting practices may limit adolescents' confidence and emotional expression. The results also highlight differences related to school context and gender, indicating that adolescents' experiences of parenting may vary across social and developmental settings. Overall, the study underscores the importance of supportive family environments in fostering healthy self-esteem during adolescence.

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