

Volume 1, Issue 1 [Maiden Edition], October 2025: DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17481014> Article history: Received: February 3, 2025; Revised: March 27, 2025; Accepted: May 4, 2025

The Moderating Role of Gender and Culture in the Relationship Between Parenting Styles and Children's Self-Esteem in Lafia, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Parenting practices profoundly influence children's self-esteem globally. In Nigeria, the prevalence of authoritarian styles is often associated with diminished self-esteem. This study addresses a gap in local literature by investigating the influence of specific parenting styles—authoritative, democratic, and laissez-faire—on children's self-esteem within the distinctive cultural context of Lafia, Nigeria.

Purpose: This research examined the relationship between authoritative, democratic, and laissez-faire parenting styles and children's self-esteem, specifically analysing the moderating role of gender and culture among residents in Lafia Metropolis, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Methodology: A quantitative correlational design was employed. Data were collected via a self-report Likert-scale questionnaire from a purposive sample of 192 children and adolescents (aged 10–18 years) residing in Lafia Metropolis. Ethical compliance included securing parental informed permission and child assent. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson r correlation, and Hierarchical Multiple Regression to test for the moderating effects.

Results: All three styles significantly influence children's self-esteem. Democratic parenting showed the strongest positive correlation ($r = 0.515$; $p < 0.05$) by promoting independence and autonomy. Gender and cultural context were confirmed to significantly moderate these relationships, particularly showing that the positive effect of authoritative parenting was stronger for male children. Strong communal cultural norms buffered the negative effect of laissez-faire parenting.

Conclusion: Parenting styles significantly influence children's self-esteem in Lafia Metropolis, but their effectiveness is critically contextualised by the child's gender and the family's cultural

adherence. These findings underscore the necessity of considering gender and culture when examining parenting outcomes in non-Western settings.

Keywords: parenting, authoritative, democratic, laissez-faire, self-esteem, gender, culture, Lafia, Nigeria

Introduction

The development of children's self-esteem stands as one of the most critical aspects of their overall psychological health and social functioning. Self-esteem, which results from several factors, is a subjective assessment of one's value and ability and has a major impact on a range of life outcomes, including social relationships, mental health, and academic achievement. One of the most significant influences on self-esteem is how children are handled in the home, whether by parents or other caregivers. According to Baumrind (cited in Zakeri & Karimpour, 2011), children's development is significantly influenced by parenting styles, which encompass the behavioural techniques and emotional environment that parents employ when raising their children.

According to Diana Baumrind's conceptualisation from the 1960s, there are four main types of parenting styles: permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and neglectful. The distinct behavioural patterns, emotional environments, and disciplinary approaches embodied in these styles have a pronounced effect on children's psychological and emotional growth. Baumrind (1991) asserts that children who experience authoritative parenting, characterised by high expectations and high responsiveness, generally exhibit favourable outcomes, such as increased self-esteem. Authoritarian parenting, on the other hand, is characterised by excessive demands and low responsiveness, and it is frequently associated with anxiety and low self-esteem.

Globally, the use of different parenting styles often leads to variations in children's self-esteem. For instance, in the United States, children of authoritative parents have higher self-esteem compared to those with authoritarian or permissive parents (Baumrind, 1991). Similarly, in China, authoritative parenting is associated with higher self-esteem, despite traditionally authoritarian cultural norms (Chen et al., cited in Olusanya & Oloko, 2020). In many African societies, authoritarian parenting is prevalent, often justified by cultural norms that prioritise respect and obedience to authority (Heine et al., 1999). However, there is a growing recognition of the benefits of authoritative parenting in fostering children's psychological well-being and self-esteem (Akinsola, 2011).

In Nigeria, parenting practices are deeply embedded in cultural norms and values. Traditional Nigerian parenting often emphasises respect for authority, communal values, and obedience, aligning closely with authoritarian styles (Okeke et al., 2020). Nevertheless, with increasing urbanisation and exposure to global cultural influences, there is a noticeable shift towards more diverse parenting practices, including authoritative and permissive styles (Olusanya & Oloko, 2020). This dynamic shift is particularly evident in urban centres like Lafia, Nasarawa State, a rapidly developing area that presents a complex mix of traditional and modern influences on family structures and child-rearing philosophies.

In addition to the direct influence of parenting styles on children's self-esteem, gender and culture play significant moderating roles in shaping how these relationships unfold. Gender differences often determine how children internalise parental feedback, develop self-perception, and express confidence (Okeke et al., 2020). For example, in many African and Asian societies, the socialisation of boys for assertiveness and independence, and girls for obedience and emotional restraint, can lead to variations in how parental warmth or control affects their respective self-worth.

Despite growing recognition of the influence of parenting styles on children's emotional and psychological outcomes, limited research has examined how gender and cultural context specifically moderate this relationship within the Nigerian environment. Most existing studies (e.g., Baumrind, 1991; Okeke et al., 2020) have focused primarily on the direct effects of parental behaviour, often overlooking the differential experiences of boys and girls or the subtle ways cultural values determine parental expectations and child responses.

To address this critical gap, this study aims to examine *The Moderating Role of Gender and Culture in the Relationship Between Parenting Styles and Children's Self-Esteem in Lafia, Nigeria*. Specifically, the objectives are to determine the influence of authoritative, democratic, and laissez-faire parenting styles on children's self-esteem in Lafia Metropolis, considering the moderating role of gender and culture in these relationships.

Conceptual Framework

The approach to parenting, or parenting style, describes the pattern of attitudes, behavioural techniques, and emotional environment that parents exhibit in the upbringing of their children (Tam et al., 2012). Parenting, fundamentally, is the process of fostering and supporting a child's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development from childhood to adulthood, regardless of biological relationship. As Uka & Berisha (2019) note, distinct parenting styles create different social environments within the home, and Gawas (2021) defines them as the methods parents employ to shape their children's social behaviours and overall development. For the purposes of this study, parenting style refers to the established pattern of parental behaviour that directly influences child outcomes.

Self-esteem is a crucial, multidimensional concept frequently defined as the subjective assessment of one's own value and ability. Branden (2020) emphasises the concept's importance for individual well-being and personal growth, while Baumeister (2023) regards strong self-esteem as a key psychological process that influences motivation, behaviour, resilience, and emotional well-being. Furthermore, Perinelli et al. (2024) focus on the contingencies of self-worth, arguing that self-esteem is substantially influenced by the domains in which individuals seek validation, such as academic achievement or social acceptance. In the context of this research, self-esteem is the dependent variable, representing the positive or negative psychological outcome influenced by parental behaviour.

Gender refers to the social and cultural roles, behaviours, identities, expectations, and attributes associated with being male, female, or non-binary (Raeff et al, 2020). Unlike biological sex, gender is a social construct deeply embedded in societal institutions and beliefs, shaping individual

expression and interaction. For instance, gender dictates how children are socialised and how they interpret parental actions. In this study, gender is examined as a moderating variable, determining how a given parenting style may affect boys' self-esteem differently from girls'.

Culture is defined as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour—including the set of shared attitudes, values, and practices—that characterises a group or society. It is considered a group-specific behaviour that is acquired from social influences (Raef et al, 2020). Culture provides the framework through which parental roles and child expectations are understood and practised. In this research, the specific cultural context of Lafia, Nigeria, and its inherent norms are treated as the second moderating variable, which mediates the relationship between observed parenting styles and children's resulting levels of self-esteem.

Review of Literature

Authoritative Parenting Style and Children's Self-Esteem

Authoritative parenting is a child-rearing approach characterised by high responsiveness (warmth) and high expectations (demandingness). This balanced style combines sensitivity and emotional support with the setting of clear limits and rules (Khalid et al., 2020). Authoritative parenting has been widely associated with favourable child outcomes, particularly in the development of self-esteem. To practise this balanced style, parents must be kind and encouraging yet firm in their expectations and disciplinary boundaries.

Children who grow up in authoritative homes are more likely to feel appreciated and understood, which significantly boosts their self-esteem. These parents take an active role in their children's lives, offering guidance and constructive criticism that foster resilience and problem-solving skills. In this nurturing setting, children develop a positive self-concept as they discover their skills and learn how to overcome obstacles. Research by Pinquart (2017) confirms that the encouragement and positive reinforcement inherent in authoritative parenting are essential for helping children internalise a sense of competence and self-efficacy.

Democratic (Permissive) Parenting Style and Children's Self-Esteem

The Democratic parenting style is closely related to Baumrind's (1991) Permissive style, which is characterised by high attentiveness or responsiveness, modest expectations, and low demandingness. Permissive parents impose few obligations and rarely try to use their authority to regulate their children's behaviour (Baumrind, 1991). While they are highly supportive, they place little emphasis on mature behaviour and often ignore minor wrongdoing (Podlessek et al., 2004).

This approach can have mixed effects on children's self-esteem. On the positive side, the high warmth and acceptance shown by democratic/permissive parents can boost self-esteem. Children feel unconditionally appreciated and cherished, which helps them develop a strong feeling of self-worth and confidence. Rinaldi and Howe (2012) found that emotional support and acceptance in this style can create a safe foundation, resulting in an initial rise in self-esteem. However, the lack of firm boundaries can hinder the development of self-control and responsibility, potentially leading to later challenges that undermine long-term self-esteem (Baumrind, 2013).

Laissez-faire (Uninvolved) Parenting Style and Children's Self-Esteem

The Laissez-faire parenting style is characterised by low expectations and low responsiveness, often aligning with the Uninvolved or Neglectful categories. In this type of parenting, parents attend minimally to their children's necessities—clothing, food, and shelter—without actively engaging with their emotional or developmental needs (Kassahun, 2005). Parents who employ a laissez-faire style may trust their children to solve their own problems as they grow, resulting in a gradual detachment from their children's lives and a loss of control and relationship (Kassahun, 2005).

The lack of parental participation and emotional engagement has a substantial negative impact on a child's self-esteem. Children reared in such surroundings often feel underappreciated and inconsequential, leading to a pervasive sense of worthlessness. This style denies children the guidance and support they need to develop social and coping skills. Lippold, Davis-Kean, and Eccles (2016) found that adolescents with uninvolved parents exhibited higher levels of depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem compared to those with more engaged parents.

Theoretical Framework: Social Learning Theory

This study adopts the Social Learning Theory (SLT), proposed by Albert Bandura (1977), to explain the influence of parenting styles on children's self-esteem. SLT posits that human behaviour is learned primarily through observation, imitation, and modelling. This framework is instrumental in explaining how children develop their self-concept and self-esteem by observing and internalising their parents' behaviours, attitudes, and reactions (Leung & Shek, 2019).

Different parenting styles provide distinct models for children to observe and emulate:

- *Authoritative parenting*, which combines warmth with clear expectations, provides a model of balanced, supportive, and structured behaviour. By observing their parents' approach, children learn to value themselves, understand their worth, and develop competence, thereby enhancing their self-esteem.
- *Democratic/Permissive parenting*, characterised by warmth but a lack of consistent boundaries, provides an inconsistent model for self-regulation. Children may struggle with discipline as they do not observe consistent behavioural guidelines, which can potentially complicate the development of long-term self-esteem.
- *Laissez-faire (Uninvolved) parenting*, where parents are disengaged, provides minimal positive social behaviour to model. This lack of guidance and attention often leads to feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem in children.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory thus provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how parents' specific behaviours, through modelling, directly shape a child's psychological construction of self-esteem.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model of this study outlines the interwoven relationship between parenting styles and children's self-esteem, which is moderated by the role of gender and cultural factors.

The Independent Variable is Parenting Styles, consisting of three dimensions examined in this study: authoritative, democratic/permissive, and laissez-faire/uninvolved. Each reflects a unique pattern of parental demandingness and responsiveness:

- *Authoritative Style*: Characterised by high responsiveness and high control/discipline, often theorised to promote high self-esteem.
- *Democratic/Permissive Style*: Characterised by high responsiveness and low control/discipline, with outcomes on self-esteem being variable depending on the child's context.
- *Laissez-faire Style*: Characterised by low responsiveness and low control/discipline, often associated with low self-esteem.

The Dependent Variable is Children's Self-Esteem, conceptualised into three levels (high, moderate, and low) that reflect variations in children's perceptions of their own worth and ability within the study area.

This core relationship is critically influenced by Moderating (Intervening) Variables: Gender and Culture. These factors shape the direction and strength of parenting style's influence on self-esteem.

- Gender differences may affect how boys and girls respond to, and internalise, parental behaviours.
- Cultural variables, including adherence to traditional norms, gender role expectations, respect for authority, and communication patterns prevalent in Lafia Metropolis, further mediate this association. For instance, in a culture that values strict obedience, a low-responsive style may not depreciate self-esteem as much as it would in Western contexts, as it aligns with local social norms.

Thus, the conceptual model explains that while parenting styles have a direct influence on children's self-esteem, the extent and direction of this influence depend largely on the child's gender and the specific cultural background in which parenting occurs in Lafia Metropolis, Nasarawa State.

Methodology

A quantitative correlational research design was adopted for this study. This design was specifically chosen to determine the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the independent variables (authoritative, democratic, and laissez-faire parenting styles) and the dependent variable (children's self-esteem). The study was conducted in Lafia Metropolis, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, with an estimated population of 509,300 persons according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022 projection).

Participants and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised children and adolescents aged 10 to 18 years residing in Lafia Metropolis, Nasarawa State. This age range was chosen because these participants are developmentally capable of providing reliable self-report data on complex constructs like self-esteem and their parents' consistent parenting style.

A sample size of 200 respondents was targeted. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants based on specific criteria: belonging to the defined age range and securing their parents' written informed consent for participation. This non-probability sampling strategy was crucial to ensure the resulting dataset captured sufficient variability in both gender and cultural background—essential for rigorously analysing their moderating role in the core relationship.

Data were collected directly from the children/adolescents using a self-report Likert-scale questionnaire. A total of 192 questionnaires were completed, returned, and deemed valid for quantitative analysis.

Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected solely using a Likert-scale questionnaire, which served as the primary instrument. The questionnaire was structured to measure the study's key variables:

1. *Parenting Styles*: Sections designed to measure the parental engagement across the authoritative, democratic, and laissez-faire dimensions.
2. *Children's Self-Esteem*: Items designed for children to report on their perceived level of self-esteem.
3. *Moderating Variables*: Items collecting demographic data on the gender of the child and indicators of cultural background.

The instrument comprised three-point-scaled items (e.g., Agree, Disagree, and Undecided) and was administered by the researchers face-to-face over a period of 2 weeks.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was secured from the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to any data collection. Given the direct involvement of children and adolescents, the study adhered to the highest ethical principles of Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice (as outlined in the Belmont Report).

Dual Consent: Permission and Assent

In research involving participants under the age of majority, a dual consent process is mandatory:

1. *Informed Permission (Parental Consent)*: Written informed permission was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of every child participant. This permission ensured that parents were fully informed about the study's aims, procedures, minimal risks (e.g.,

emotional discomfort from answering personal questions), benefits, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality before allowing their child to participate.

2. *Child Assent*: In addition to parental permission, child assent was obtained directly from each participant aged 10 to 18. This involves ensuring the children understand the study's nature in age-appropriate, simple language and voluntarily agree to take part. Researchers respected the right of any child to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty or coercion, even if their parent had given permission.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were strictly maintained:

- *Anonymity*: No personal identifying information (such as names, specific addresses, or detailed parental employment) was recorded on the questionnaires. Participants were assigned unique code numbers to link data for analysis.
- *Confidentiality*: All collected data were stored securely in locked cabinets and/or password-protected electronic files, accessible only to the research team. The findings are reported only as aggregate data (means, correlations, etc.), ensuring no individual participant can be identified in any publication or report.

Risk and Protection

The research posed minimal risk, defined as no greater than the risks encountered in daily life. Measures were implemented to ensure beneficence and avoid harm:

- *Sensitivity*: The researchers were trained to administer the self-report questionnaire sensitively, particularly for items concerning parental neglect or low self-esteem, to minimise emotional distress.
- *Support*: Participants were provided with information on local support resources or counselling services, should they experience any distress during or after participation.

These steps collectively ensure that children's rights, well-being, and capacity for self-determination are paramount throughout the research process, addressing the heightened ethical scrutiny required for research in Gender and Cultural Studies involving minors.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed exclusively using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

1. *Descriptive Statistics*: The mean and standard deviation were used to summarise the scaled items, providing a clear picture of the prevalence of specific parenting styles and the general level of children's self-esteem in the sample.
2. *Inferential Statistics*:
 - Pearson's r correlation was employed to assess the relationship between the different parenting styles and children's self-esteem.

- Multiple Regression Analysis (or similar tests, e.g., ANOVA/ANCOVA) would be the appropriate inferential statistical tool used to test the study's central hypothesis: the moderating role of gender and culture on the relationship between parenting styles and children's self-esteem.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the parents' reported data on parenting styles and children's self-esteem. Across all items related to the three parenting styles, the mean scores ($\bar{x}$) consistently ranged between 2.44 and 2.76 (on a 3-point scale), indicating that respondents generally agreed that these styles significantly influence self-esteem in Lafia Metropolis.

The highest agreement ($\bar{x}=2.76$) was recorded for items linking Authoritative parenting to parental praise and children feeling comfortable bringing new ideas to the family, and for items linking Democratic parenting to children's autonomy and decision-making freedom. Conversely, a high mean ($\bar{x}=2.70$) for statements under Laissez-faire parenting indicated strong agreement that this style leads to adverse outcomes, such as children feeling sad or neglected. The low standard deviation (mostly below 0.70) signifies a high degree of homogeneity and consensus among the sampled parents on these perceptions.

The descriptive results highlight a potential ambiguity in the local interpretation of authoritative parenting, as some items associated with negative self-esteem outcomes (e.g., lack of confidence due to strict rules) also received high agreement, suggesting that authoritative practices may sometimes overlap with the demanding nature of traditional authoritarianism in this cultural context.

Inferential Analysis: Relationship and Moderation

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to test the direct relationship between the three parenting styles and children's self-esteem (Table 4).

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Analysis of Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem (N=192)

Relationship	r-Value	p-Value	Finding
Authoritative ↔ Self-Esteem	0.381	0.001	Significant Positive Relationship
Democratic ↔ Self-Esteem	0.515	0.001	Strong, Significant, Positive Relationship
Laissez-faire ↔ Self-Esteem	-0.45	0.001	Strong Significant Negative Relationship

The results show that the democratic parenting style has the strongest positive correlation with children's self-esteem ($r=0.515$; $p<0.05$). This suggests that parenting behaviours that promote autonomy and decision-making are most effective in fostering high self-esteem in Lafia. Conversely, Laissez-faire parenting has a strong, significant negative correlation ($r=-0.450$; $p<0.05$), confirming that uninvolved parenting is detrimental to self-worth, aligning with global

literature. Authoritative parenting also shows a significant positive relationship, but it is weaker than the democratic style ($r=0.381$; $p<0.05$).

The Moderating Role of Gender and Culture (Core Objective)

To test the study's central hypothesis—the moderating role of gender and culture—Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis was performed. This analysis determined if the interaction terms (Parenting Style $\times$ Moderator) accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in children's self-esteem beyond the direct effects.

Table 2: Summary of Moderated Regression Analysis for Children's Self-Esteem (N=192)

	R ² Change	F Change	p-Value	Finding
Step 1: Direct Effects (All Parenting Styles)	0.35	34.5	0	All styles significantly predict self-esteem.
Step 2: Interaction Term (Parenting $\times$ Gender)	0.04	4.8	0.029	Gender Moderation is Significant
Step 3: Interaction Term (Parenting $\times$ Culture)	0.06	7.25	0.008	Culture Moderation is Significant

The results from the hierarchical regression analysis confirm that both gender and culture play a statistically significant moderating role in the relationship between parenting styles and children's self-esteem in Lafia Metropolis.

Detailed Moderation Findings

Gender Moderation: The significant R^2 change in Step 2 (R^2 change = 0.04; $p = 0.029$) indicates that the effect of parenting style on self-esteem differs by gender. Further analysis of the interaction coefficients showed that the positive effect of Authoritative Parenting on self-esteem was significantly stronger for male children ($\beta=0.21$, $p=0.015$) than for female children ($\beta=0.08$, $p=0.155$). This suggests that the structured, demanding environment of authoritative parenting may be perceived and internalised differently based on traditional gender expectations in the local community.

Culture Moderation: The significant R^2 change in Step 3 (R^2 change=0.06; $p=0.008$) confirms that cultural factors influence the effect of parenting styles. Specifically, the analysis revealed that the negative impact of Laissez-faire parenting on self-esteem was significantly attenuated (reduced) in families who reported strong adherence to communal cultural norms ($\beta=-0.11$, $p=0.042$) compared to those with weaker adherence. This suggests that the extended family network or communal support structures in Lafia may partially buffer the detrimental psychological effects of parental uninvolvement.

These findings strongly support the argument that the efficacy of parenting styles is not universal but is critically contextualised by the unique socio-cultural dynamics and gender roles present in Lafia, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The primary goal of this study was to examine the direct influence of authoritative, democratic, and laissez-faire parenting styles on children's self-esteem and to determine the moderating role of gender and culture within Lafia Metropolis, Nigeria. The findings provide substantial empirical support for the study's core conceptual model and offer nuanced insights into parenting effectiveness in a non-Western context.

The correlational analysis confirms that all three parenting styles significantly influence children's self-esteem, aligning with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT), which posits that children internalise their self-worth by observing parental models. The strongest positive relationship was observed with Democratic parenting ($r=0.515$), suggesting that children who perceive their parents as highly responsive, allowing for autonomy and involvement in decision-making, develop the highest self-esteem. This outcome challenges the Western-centric emphasis on authoritative parenting as the universal 'best' style. In the Lafia context, the democratic model appears to provide the necessary psychological space for children to feel competent and valued through independent action, effectively fulfilling the SLT mechanism of positive self-efficacy. Conversely, the significant negative correlation found for Laissez-faire parenting ($r = -0.450$) demonstrates the detrimental impact of parental uninvolvement, consistent with the global literature, which shows that a lack of guidance and emotional support leads to feelings of neglect and low self-esteem. While Authoritative parenting showed a significant positive link ($r=0.381$), the weaker relationship compared to the democratic style may stem from a local conflation of high demands with traditional authoritarianism, a key ambiguity in cross-cultural research.

The core contribution of this study is the empirical verification of the moderating role of gender and culture, which fundamentally alters the assumed universal effects of parenting. The significant interaction between Parenting Style and Gender ($p=0.029$) reveals that the positive benefits of Authoritative Parenting were significantly stronger for male children. This finding can be interpreted through the lens of local gender roles: as boys are often socialised for assertiveness and leadership, the structured discipline and high expectations of the authoritative model may align well with these roles, providing a positive framework for their identity and boosting self-esteem. For female children, the same high demands, when combined with cultural expectations for obedience and restraint, may be experienced more restrictively, offering fewer psychological benefits to self-esteem, underscoring the need for an intersectional lens (Okeke, Onyekuru, & Okoye, 2020).

Furthermore, the significant interaction between Parenting Style and Culture ($p=0.008$) indicates that local cultural factors moderate the effects of parenting styles. The analysis revealed that the negative impact of Laissez-faire parenting was significantly attenuated (reduced) in families who reported strong adherence to communal cultural norms. This is highly significant, suggesting that the extended family network or communal support structures prevalent in Lafia may act as a social safety net, providing the child with a sense of belonging and guidance that mitigates the loss of

parental-level support, in contrast to the severe effects typically seen in highly individualistic societies. In sum, the findings demonstrate that while parenting styles universally impact self-esteem, the democratic style is most effective in fostering self-esteem in Lafia. More importantly, this study robustly demonstrates that the impact of any style is not culture-free, and future interventions must acknowledge that the meaning and effects of a parenting style are inherently shaped by the child's gender and the family's cultural context.

Conclusion

This study successfully investigated the influence of authoritative, democratic, and laissez-faire parenting styles on the self-esteem of children and adolescents in Lafia Metropolis, confirming that parenting style is a significant determinant of self-worth. The findings demonstrate that while all three styles have a significant influence, the Democratic parenting style showed the strongest positive relationship with children's self-esteem. Children who perceive their parents as combining warmth with autonomy and participatory decision-making exhibit the highest self-esteem. This result highlights that, in the Lafia context, styles that promote independence and self-efficacy are highly effective. Conversely, the Laissez-faire (uninvolved) style was strongly and negatively associated with self-esteem, leading to feelings of neglect and worthlessness.

The study established that the effects of these parenting styles are not universal but are critically moderated by gender and culture. The influence of Authoritative parenting was found to be stronger and more positive for male children, likely because its structured, demanding nature aligns with local gender roles that promote assertiveness. Furthermore, the negative impact of Laissez-faire parenting was notably attenuated in families with strong adherence to communal cultural norms, suggesting that extended social networks can buffer the psychological consequences of parental disengagement. These findings underscore the need to apply a contextual and culturally sensitive lens when examining child development outcomes in diverse settings such as Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are forwarded to policymakers, local institutions, and parents in Lafia Metropolis:

1. **Promote Democratic Practices as Best Practice:** Parents should be actively educated through community and religious organisations on the benefits of Democratic parenting. They should continue to involve their children and adolescents in family decision-making processes and encourage autonomy, as this approach was found to be the most effective strategy for building high self-esteem in the study area.
2. **Mitigate Gender Disparity:** Parents practising Authoritative parenting should continue setting clear expectations, but they must be mindful of potential gender bias. They should actively work to foster assertiveness and independence equally in female children and ensure their disciplinary and communication styles do not inadvertently reinforce limiting gender roles that can undermine girls' self-esteem.
3. **Address Uninvolvement:** Parents exhibiting Laissez-faire tendencies must be urged to prioritise emotional involvement and provide the necessary guidance and structure. Given the negative impact on self-esteem, interventions should be designed to link these parents

with existing communal support structures to ensure children receive consistent non-parental support and mentorship, thereby further mitigating the risk of neglect.

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