

Gratification Delay and Parenting Behaviour: A Study on Pre-School Children

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Abstract:

This study examined gratification delay and parenting behaviour among the preschoolers. Maternal child-rearing approaches have been identified as important in the development of children's capacity to delay gratification (e.g., Olson et al., 1990; Vaughn et al., 1984). The participants in the study were divided into two subgroups of 'success' and 'failures' with the help of an activity planned on the basis of the famous 'Stanford Marshmallow Experiment' (Mischel et al., 1972). A self-report of maternal parenting style was obtained. A behavioral checklist was also filled up by the mother and the teacher of these subjects. The results indicated a significant difference in the parenting of preschoolers who could delay gratification and those who could not. Significant difference was also obtained in the disruptive behaviour exhibited by the two groups of preschoolers as rated by their teachers and mothers.

Keywords: *Gratification delay, parenting behaviour, disruptive behaviour*

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Introduction:

Self-regulation is an integrated learning process, consisting of the development of a set of constructive behaviors that affect one's learning. Self-regulation is fundamental to the ways in which individuals manage their own learning and behavior (Butler, 2002; Zimmerman, 2001). The development of the capacity for self-regulation represents an important achievement of childhood that is associated with social, behavioral and academic competence (Bronson, 2001).

One of the hardest things to do for most people is delaying their immediate gratification. Delay of gratification denotes a person's ability to wait in order to obtain something that he or she wants. It occurs when an individual works towards the achievement of a distant goal and eschews more immediate but less desirable goals. It steadily improves from the early childhood years into adolescence. The internalized, self-imposed behavioral

component is fundamental to the ability to delay gratification. Moreover, people who lack the psychological trait of being able to delay gratification are said to require instant gratification and might suffer poor impulse control.

Several studies have examined possible factors that contribute to the development of delay of gratification. Some of these factors are *parental knowledge* (Horn and Knight, 1996), *parental discipline style*, (Mauro and Harris, 2000; Weller & Berkowitz, 1975), *choice* (Horn and Fabes, 1984), and *self-discovery technique* used to delay gratification. Mauro and Harris reported that general parenting styles and specific parenting practices shape children's competence. **Parenting** is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting has also been defined as "anything the parent does or fails to do that may affect the child" (Kendziora & O'Leary, 1993).

Parenting behaviors are the specific, goal-directed actions which impact directly on the child (e.g., discipline, reasoning). Although specific parenting behaviors may influence child development, researchers generally attempt to describe comprehensive parenting typologies. The preschool period is a time of development when children individuate and assert their independence.

A parenting style is a psychological construct representing standard strategies that parents use in their child rearing. Parenting style encapsulates two important elements of parenting: “responsiveness” and “demandingness” (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parental responsiveness which can also be referred to as parental warmth and supportiveness is defined by Baumrind (1991) as the “extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands.” Parental demandingness, meanwhile, refers to supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys as well as expectations and claims that force the children to become integrated into the family whole (Baumrind, 1991).

Maternal child-rearing approaches have been identified as important in the development of children's capacity to delay gratification (e.g., Olson et al., 1990; Vaughn et al., 1984). Baumrind identified three approaches to parenting that differed around the dimensions of nurturance and restrictiveness. Authoritarian, Permissive, and Authoritative.

Authoritarian parents, also called strict parenting, is characterized by high expectations of conformity and compliance to parental rules and directions, while allowing little open dialogue between parent and child. Permissive parents, also called indulgent, nondirective or lenient, is characterized as having few

behavioral expectations for the child. "Permissive parenting is a style of parenting in which parents are very involved with their children but place few demands or controls on them." Authoritative parents, also called 'assertive democratic' or 'balanced' parenting, is characterized by a child-centered approach that holds high expectations of maturity. Authoritative parents can understand their children's feelings and teach them how to regulate them. They encourage children to be independent but still places limits and controls on their actions.

Authoritative parenting has been found to be associated with better child outcomes than have the other two approaches in many studies, and across a range of outcomes. Children raised by authoritative parents tend to be more capable, happy and successful.

Mauro and Harris (2000), Reitman and Gross (1997) have all reported evidence that over controlling mothers and/or permissive mothers (based on Baumrind's classification) are less effective in developing self-regulation in their children than are authoritative mothers.

Objectives:

1. To compare the difference in parenting of preschoolers who could delay gratification and those who could not.
2. To compare the disruptive behavior of children who could delay gratification and those who could not.

Hypotheses:

Based on the review of literature and past studies, the following hypotheses have been formulated for verification of this study through empirical investigation:

H1. There will be a significant difference in the parenting of preschoolers who could delay gratification and those who could not.

H2. Preschoolers who can delay gratification will show less disruptive behavior than preschoolers who cannot delay gratification.

Method:

Sample:

The target population for the study consisted of preschool children aged 3-6 years. Sampling was done through convenient sampling. Sample was drawn from various reputed preschools of Jaipur city and comprised of 50 preschoolers living in nuclear families with non-working mothers.

Sample Characteristics:

SEX	BOYS	26	52%
	GIRLS	24	48%
AGE	3-4 Yrs	30	60%
	5-6 Yrs	20	40%
SIBLINGS	NIL	20	40%
	1	22	44%
	2	8	16%

Instruments:

Following instruments have been used in the study:

Personal Information Sheet: It was designed to gather personal information of the child.

Disruptive Behavior Disorders Rating Scale:

This scale was developed by Barkley (1997) for the purpose of assessing disruptive behavior. It can be completed by parents or teachers. Both forms include 26 items describing inattentive, hyperactive-impulsive, and oppositional defiant behaviors. Items are scored using a 4-point Likert-type scale, with anchors ranging from 0 ("never") to 3 ("very often").

Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ): It was developed by

Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen & Hart (2001). The PSDQ is a 32-item self-report measure of parenting practices that are characteristic of each of Diana Baumrind's (1971) parenting styles. It is a modified version of the original 62-item PSDQ, which was developed for use with parents of pre-school and school-age children. Parenting behaviors reflected in each item" using a 5-point scale anchored by 1 (never) and 5 (always). This yields a self-report measure of authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting for mothers and for fathers. For the present research mother's responses have been used. The PSDQ questionnaire is reliable and valid measure that is widely used by

psychologists. The Cronbach's alpha for primary factors was found to be 0.91 (authoritative), 0.86 (authoritarian) and 0.75 (permissive) (Robinson et al., 2001).

Procedure:

Firstly, the 'activity' was conducted with a large group of preschoolers. Then 25 'success' and 25 'failures' were identified on the basis of this activity as follows: From that large group each student was asked to be seated in a room with a chair, a table, one chocolate and, a bell. The chocolate was kept on the table and the child was instructed that the researcher will go out of that room for few minutes. He/she is welcome to eat the chocolate or to ring the bell while the

researcher is gone. However, when the researcher will return and if he/she hasn't eaten the chocolate then the child will be rewarded with two chocolates. Preschool behavioral checklist, personal information sheet and self report parenting behavior scale were used to collect the data. Scoring was done and accordingly the interpretation was made.

Results & Discussion:

Table1: Mean and SD of Parenting Styles in the two groups of children

	Authoritative		Permissive		Authoritarian	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Failure (N=25)	24.04±	3.102	19.08±	4.974	22.88±	4.00
Success (N=25)	31.04±	5.77	16.96±	3.89	19.2±	4.143

It is clearly evident that the children of authoritative parents were more able to delay gratification as compared to the children of permissive and authoritarian parents.

Children of permissive parents were less successful in delaying gratification as compared to the children of authoritative parents and authoritarian parents.

Similarly, children of authoritarian parents were also less successful in delaying gratification as compared to the children of authoritative parents. But the results also showed that these children were able to delay more of gratification as compared to the children of permissive parents.

In order to test the postulated hypotheses, t-test was applied and t-values for different groups were obtained:

While testing the hypothesis 1 it was found that there was a significant difference in the parenting of preschoolers in the two groups.

Table 2: t test between the two groups for different parenting styles

PARENTING STYLES	FAILURE		SUCCESS		t
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Authoritative	24.04	3.102	31.04	5.77	5.343**
Permissive	19.08	4.974	16.96	3.89	1.679
Authoritarian	22.88	4.00	19.2	4.143	3.194**

** Significant at .01

Table 2 clearly shows that children of authoritative parents were more able to delay gratification as compared to the children of authoritarian parents as well as of permissive parents.

This shows that there is a significant difference between the children of authoritative parents and children of authoritarian parents in their ability to delay gratification. In other words, children of authoritative parents are more successful in their ability to delay gratification.

Table 3: Correlation of problem behavior and parenting style

Parenting Styles	Problem Behavior as rated by mother	Problem Behavior as rated by teacher
Authoritative	-.772**	-.404*
Permissive	.307*	.040
Authoritarian	.367**	.130

* Significant at .05

** Significant at .01

It is clearly evident that authoritative parenting style has a negative correlation with both, the problem behavior as rated by mother as well as with problem behavior as rated by teacher. On the other hand, permissive and authoritarian parenting styles have a positive correlation with the problem behavior as rated by mother and with problem behavior as rated by teacher.

While testing the hypothesis 2 it was found that preschoolers who could delay gratification showed less problem behavior than preschoolers who could not delay gratification.

Table 4: t test between the problem behaviour reported for the two groups by mothers and teachers

Reported Problem Behavior	FAILURE		SUCCESS		t
	MEAN	S.D.	MEAN	S.D.	
Mother	50.9	5.634	40.2	11.39	4.187**
Teacher	62.96	7.002	57.76	7.63	2.511*

* significant at .05

** significant at .01

It is clearly evident that preschoolers who could delay gratification reported less problem behavior on mother's rating as compared to the preschoolers who could not delay gratification.

Similarly, preschoolers who could delay gratification reported less problem behavior on teacher's rating as compared to the preschoolers

who could not delay gratification.

Therefore, we can say that there is a significant difference in the problem behavior of children who could delay gratification and those who could not on mothers' and teachers' rating. In other words, children who could not delay gratification reported more problem behavior on both, teachers' as well as mothers' rating.

Discussion:

This study revealed that the ability to delay gratification among the preschoolers was influenced by parenting styles. The students with authoritative parents were more able to delay gratification than the students with authoritarian and permissive parents.

The students with permissive and authoritarian parents were also able to delay gratification but the number of failures in these two categories were more.

Both authoritative and permissive parents are responsive. They intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation and self-assertion by being attuned and supportive. They also try to meet children's special needs and demands (Baumrind, 1991). Supportive parenting attitudes and behavior toward the child's psychological autonomy can result in higher levels of self-esteem and behavioral regulation abilities in children (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Therefore, authoritative parenting styles and encouragement of the expression of individuality may help children to be able to implement self-regulated learning strategies such as delay of gratification. A review of the research shows a strong positive relation between supportive parenting attitudes and children's delay of gratification ability (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989). Otto, Perels and Schmitz (2008) revealed that significant correlations exist between parental support for autonomy and children's self-regulated learning.

Maccoby and Martin (1983) emphasized that children who have authoritative parents have higher levels of delayed gratification achievement, social development, and self perception than those who have authoritarian and permissive parents. All this earlier research supports the findings of the work described here.

While authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive, permissive parents

are more responsive than they are demanding (Wolfradt, Hempel & Miles, 2003). Demanding parents try to force children to become integrated into the family whole, by their demand for maturity, their supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritative parents monitor their children's conduct and impart clear standards. Their disciplinary methods are supportive rather than punitive. Permissive parents, on the other hand, are non coercive. They are lenient, do not require mature behavior and avoid confrontation (Bogels & Melick, 2004). Stable and consistent parenting styles and behavior in implementing the rules in families can act as a model on the basis of which the child can develop self-regulation abilities, the ability to delay gratification being one of those (Sumer & Gungor, 1999). So we can conclude that parenting control can have positive effects on children's ability to delay gratification. In one study Chung Wha (1999) revealed that psychological control by parents of children has positive effects on success in all the areas. But these positive effects of parenting control over children are only possible if the parents are reliable and flexible in their attitudes and behavior towards their children. Otherwise, if in order to rear their child according to their beliefs, they can cause the child's self-esteem to diminish because they do not give the child enough opportunities to manage him/herself (Georgiou, 2007).

These circumstances can affect the self-regulation abilities of the child in a negative way and produce anxiety.

On the other hand, students with authoritarian parents are not so successful in delaying their immediate gratification. Authoritarian parents are highly demanding and controlling, but not responsive. These parents provide well-ordered and structured

environments with clearly stated rules. They have a problem with meeting their children's needs and demands. If parents fail to meet the needs of the child, the child can become passive and suffer lack of self-confidence and have poor self-regulated ability (Leung & Kwan, 1998).

The present study also indicates that self-regulation ability of those students with authoritative parents is higher than that of the students with authoritarian and permissive parents. If the parents give their child enough opportunities to be autonomous and involve their child's needs enough, they can provide suitable conditions for the child to be self-efficient which also fosters their self-regulated ability (McClun & Merrel, 1998).

Conclusion:

According to these results it can be concluded that parents should be both responsive and demanding. The parents should set clear rules, monitor their children's behavior and expect success from their children but all the while supporting their children and satisfying their psychological needs. These parenting styles seem to complement each other. If one of them is missing, particularly responsiveness, children's self-regulated ability can be diminished (Sternberg, Elmen & Mounts, 1989).

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