



## Effects of parenting styles on adolescent and adult adjustment: which parenting style is more beneficial in Spanish families?

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**Título:** Efectos de los estilos parentales en el ajuste de adolescentes y adultos: ¿qué estilo parental es el más beneficioso en las familias españolas?

**Resumen:** Un debate clásico en la investigación es si uno de los dos componentes de la socialización parental (severidad y afecto) tiene un mayor impacto en el ajuste psicosocial no sólo en experiencias tempranas como la adolescencia, sino también a largo plazo, en etapas posteriores del desarrollo del ciclo vital. El objetivo de la presente investigación fue analizar la asociación entre los estilos parentales y el patrón de ajuste psicosocial en hijos adolescentes y adultos. Los participantes fueron 2087 hijos españoles (58,8% mujeres). Se aplicó un MANOVA ( $4 \times 2 \times 4$ ), donde los estilos parentales, el sexo y los grupos de edad fueron variables independientes, y el autoconcepto social, la autoestima, la falta de respuesta emocional, la empatía y el valor de la benevolencia fueron variables dependientes. Los resultados revelaron que los hijos socializados en familias autoritativas e indulgentes (con afecto) obtuvieron mejores puntuaciones en ajuste psicosocial que aquellos de otros estilos parentales. Las puntuaciones de empatía eran más altas en los estilos de afecto (autoritativo e indulgente), independientemente de la dimensión de severidad. Contrariamente a los hallazgos clásicos con familias europeo-americanas, el afecto parental se asoció positivamente con el ajuste psicosocial independientemente de la severidad (estilos indulgente y autoritativo).

**Palabras clave:** Estilos parentales. Afecto. Severidad. Edad adulta. Ajuste psicosocial.

**Abstract:** A classical debate in parenting research is whether one of the two components of parental socialization (strictness and warmth) has a greater impact in psychosocial adjustment not only in early experiences such as in adolescence, but also in the long-term in further developmental stages of the lifecycle. The objective of the present research was to analyze the association between parenting styles and the pattern of psychosocial adjustment in adolescent and adult offspring. Participants were 2087 Spanish offspring (58.8% women). A MANOVA ( $4 \times 2 \times 4$ ) was applied, where parenting styles, sex, and age groups were independent variables, and social self-concept, self-esteem, emotional unresponsiveness, empathy, and the value of benevolence were dependent variables. The results revealed that children raised in authoritative and indulgent (i.e., warm) families scored better in psychosocial adjustment than other family styles. Empathy scores were higher in warm parenting styles (i.e., authoritative and indulgent), independently of the strictness dimension. Contrary to classical findings with European-American families, parental warmth was positively associated with psychosocial adjustment independently of strictness (i.e., indulgent and authoritative parenting).

**Keywords:** Parenting styles. Warmth. Strictness. Adulthood. Psychosocial adjustment.

### Introduction

Parental socialization is carried out by adults (parents or primary caregivers), whose aim is for the child to acquire habits and values that are specific to their culture to adapt to their context successfully and become a competent member of society (Baumrind, 1978; Maccoby, 1992). For decades, parental socialization has been studied through a two-dimensional theoretical model that includes the study of different parental practices through two dimensions: warmth and strictness. From the late 1930s, Symonds (Symonds, 1939) examined parenting based on two main dimensions, called acceptance/rejection and dominance/submission. He examined the significance of parent-child relationships in personality development. Beginning in the 1960s, Baumrind's cross-sectional and longitudinal studies made significant advances. She proposed the analysis of three parenting styles and their consequences on child development. The three parenting styles were authoritative (high control com-

bined with reasoning and warmth), authoritarian (high control without reasoning and warmth) and permissive (only characterized by low control) (Baumrind, 1966, 1968, 1971, 1978, 1983).

Baumrind's theoretical model served as a basis for new theoretical models. For instance, in the 1980s Maccoby and Martin (1983) examined parenting based on an orthogonal model with two independent dimensions (demandingness and responsiveness). The combination of these two theoretically independent dimensions leads to the classification of four typologies of families: authoritative parents are demanding but responsive (i.e., greater warmth and strictness); authoritarian parents are also demanding but not responsive (i.e., higher strictness, but lower warmth); indulgent parents are not demanding but responsive (i.e., higher warmth, but lower strictness); and neglectful parents are neither demanding nor responsive (i.e., lower warmth and strictness).

Research based on the two-dimensional model classifies different parental behaviours according to their degree of warmth and strictness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Martinez et al., 2019, 2012). Different labels have been used across decades to define both parental di-

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mensions but with a common meaning. Overall, warmth was habitually operationalized using measures of parental acceptance and involvement, while strictness came to be defined based on parental firmness (Steinberg, 2005). The warmth dimension refers to the degree of parental involvement, support, or displays of love and affection from parents, using dialogue and reasoning when children show inappropriate behaviours (Martinez et al., 2017; Martinez-Escudero et al., 2023). Other labels used for the warmth dimension were assurance (Baldwin, 1955), acceptance (Symonds, 1939), love (Schaefer, 1959), involvement (Lamborn et al., 1991), and responsiveness (Baumrind, 1983). The strictness dimension refers to the degree to which parents act in an imposing manner, with high levels of control and rigidity in the rules and imposition of authority to control their children's behaviours (Martinez et al., 2021; Martinez-Escudero et al., 2020). Other labels used for the strictness dimension were hostility (Baldwin, 1955), domination (Symonds, 1939), restrictiveness (Becker & Krug, 1964), firm control (Lewis, 1981), and demandingness (Baumrind, 1983).

The focus of several investigations over the past decades has been on identifying the optimal parenting style for good psychological and social adjustment of children (Alcaide et al., 2025a; Baumrind, 1971; Fuentes et al., 2022; Krauss & Orth, 2024; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Reyes et al., 2023; Rhee et al., 2006). Overall, classical research mainly from European-American families revealed that parental strictness in combination with warmth (i.e., authoritative parenting style) is associated with the greatest scores on healthy development (Steinberg et al., 1992; Steinberg, 2001; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The authoritative style is related to the most positive psychosocial adjustment on different criteria compared to the other parenting styles in European-American contexts (Lamborn et al., 1991; Rhee et al., 2006; Steinberg et al., 1994). For example, authoritative parenting has been positively associated with good adjustment in children in terms of better self-perceptions (Lamborn et al., 1991), greater social skills (Baumrind, 1991), emotional regulation (Darling & Steinberg, 1993), orientation to social standards (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994) and prosocial behaviours (Eisenberg, 2002).

Much of the previous research has identified that authoritative parenting may be best suited for good child psychosocial adjustment, especially in studies conducted with European-American families. However, the combination of strictness with warmth (i.e., the authoritative style) could not be related to universal

benefits (Palacios et al., 2022). Discrepant findings on optimal parenting have been found depending on the cultural and ethnic context in which the parental socialization process takes place (Alcaide et al., 2025b; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Garcia & Gracia, 2009; Garcia et al., 2019; Pinquart & Gerke, 2019; Pinquart & Lauk, 2024). Additionally, it is argued that in European-American families, the authoritarian and indulgent styles are both related to a mixture of positive and negative traits. Specifically, in comparison to the authoritative style, the authoritarian style benefits from the shared component (i.e., strictness) but suffers from the lack of warmth, while the indulgent style benefits from warmth but suffers from the lack of strictness. Lastly, neglectful parenting is related to the worst scores due to the lack of both components (i.e., warmth, and strictness) (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994).

For instance, a growing body of research, mainly conducted with families from Europe and Latin American countries revealed the benefits of parental warmth without parental strictness (i.e., the indulgent style) (Calafat et al., 2014; Garcia et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2007, 2020). Overall, indulgent parenting is associated with equal or even more positive outcomes than authoritative parenting (Fuentes et al., 2022; Garcia & Gracia, 2009; Martin-Blesa et al., 2024; Palacios et al., 2022). The indulgent style, in comparison to the other parenting styles, is related to psychological and personal adjustment of children in different criteria such as greater signs of psychosocial maturity (Garcia & Serra, 2019), maladjustment (Perez-Gramaje et al., 2020), internalization of social values (Gimenez-Serrano et al., 2022; Queiroz et al., 2020), including environmental values (Queiroz et al., 2020), aggression (de la Torre et al., 2011), self-concept (Musitu & Garcia, 2004) and drug use (Calafat et al., 2014; Villarejo et al., 2024), including alcohol (Garcia et al., 2020b) and tobacco (Riquelme et al., 2018), academic success (Fuentes et al., 2015) and regulation of learning strategies and stress (Fuentes et al., 2019).

Studies conducted in the USA with African-American (Baumrind, 1972; Deater-Deckard et al., 1996) and Chinese-American (Chao, 1994, 2001) ethnic minorities reveal some benefits of parental strictness even without the warmth component. For example, higher levels of independence and assertiveness in African-American families have been found with the authoritarian style (Baumrind, 1972). Findings on Chinese Americans reveal better adjustment and school performance in families employing the authoritarian style (Chao, 2001). Also, in cultural contexts characterized

by hierarchical relationships, such as in Arab families have also found that the authoritarian style does not have a negative impact on children's mental health (Dwairy et al., 2006; Dwairy & Achoui, 2006).

Traditionally, research has focused on the association between parenting styles and child psychosocial adjustment while parents are raising children (childhood and adolescence) (Baumrind, 1971; Fuentes et al., 2022; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Reyes et al., 2023; Rhee et al., 2006). Despite developmental theories highlighting the positive or negative long-term consequences of early family experiences on adult development (Barthomew & Horowitz, 1991; Freud, 1933; Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2025; Maccoby, 1992), less is known about the links between parental socialization and psychological and behavioural adjustment in adulthood.

Only in recent years, there has been a growing interest in researching the effects of parenting on adult offspring of different age groups once the socialisation process has been completed and how it impacts on children's psychological, personal, and social adjustment throughout adulthood (Aquilino & Supple, 2001; Garcia et al., 2018b, 2020a). Empirical evidence is limited, as studies mainly focus on young adults (Aquilino & Supple, 2001), comparisons are mostly done between adolescents and older adult groups (Garcia et al., 2018b), and adjustment indicators used for adolescents and adult offspring are unlike (Stafford et al., 2016). The theoretical parenting model based on two dimensions to define the four parenting styles is widely common in studies with children (Alonso-Geta, 2012; Rhee et al., 2006) and adolescents (Chen et al., 2024; Garcia & Gracia, 2009; Lamborn et al., 1991). However, studies with adult offspring usually capture parenting based on practices (Aquilino & Supple, 2001) or parenting styles (Buri, 1991), but often without considering the dimensions (i.e., warmth and strictness).

### The present study

This study aims to analyse the relationship between parenting styles (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful) and the pattern of psychosocial adjustment of adolescent and adult offspring (young, middle-aged, and older adults). Adolescent children are under the supervision and care of their parents (parental socialization is in process), but adult offspring are not (parental socialization has ended). Although adolescent and adult offspring are at different life stages, their psychosocial adjustment is examined through the

same indicators (social self-concept, self-esteem, empathy, emotional unresponsiveness, and benevolence values). In line with previous research, it is expected that authoritative and indulgent parenting (both characterised by warmth), compared to the authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles (both characterised by lack of warmth), would be related to greater social self-concept, self-esteem, empathy, benevolent social values, and lower emotional unresponsiveness.

## Materials and Method

### Participants and procedure

The sample were 2,087 Spanish participants, 1,227 women (58.8%) and 860 men (41.2%) including both adolescent and adult offspring from 12 to 92 years old ( $M = 36.22$ ,  $SD = 20.36$ ) distributed by age in four groups: 580 adolescents aged 12-18 years old (27.8%,  $M = 16.68$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ); 610 young adults aged 19-35 years old (29.2%,  $M = 23.70$ ,  $SD = 3.78$ ); 504 middle-aged adults aged 36-59 years old (24.2%,  $M = 48.41$ ,  $SD = 6.25$ ); and 393 older adults over 60 years (18.8%,  $M = 68.86$ ,  $SD = 7.82$ ). An a priori power analysis was applied, and results determined that a minimum sample size of 1,724 participants was required to detect with a statistical power of .95 ( $\alpha = .05$ ;  $1 - \beta = .95$ ) for a small effect size ( $f = .10$ ) on the four parenting styles. Based on the sample collected ( $N = 2080$ ), sensitivity power analysis ( $\alpha = .05$ ;  $1 - \beta = .95$ ) revealed that an effect size of less than 1%,  $f > .01$  (.091) can be detected. G\*Power was used to perform the statistical power analysis (Faul et al., 2007, 2009).

The sample was recruited from a large metropolitan area on the East Coast of Spain with over one million inhabitants. The sampling method for recruiting both adolescent and adult participants was as follows: adolescents were enrolled from a full list of high schools. For this aim, the heads of each high school were invited to participate. If the head of the high school refused to participate, another high school was selected from the full list until the required sample size was completed (Martinez-Escudero et al., 2023; Riquelme et al., 2018). Young adults were recruited from undergraduate courses (Parish & McCluskey, 1992; Turner et al., 2009). Middle-aged adults were recruited from randomly selected middle-class neighbourhoods, the selection of respondents was based on door-to-door canvassing (Climent-Galarza et al., 2022; Martinez-Escudero et al., 2023). Older adults were recruited from senior citizen centres. Based on the complete list of senior citizen

centres, if one centre refused to participate, another from the list was chosen until completing the sample size required (Alcaide et al., 2023; Gimenez-Serrano et al., 2022). As in previous research with healthy older adults, all respondents lived independently and were screened to evaluate their ability to complete study procedures (Jonnalagadda et al., 2000). Additionally, a research assistant was present to facilitate the collective administration (adolescents, young and older adults). In all cases, to guarantee anonymity of responses, identifiers and survey data were put in independent files, directory passwords were protected, and sensitive files were coded (Garcia et al., 2021; Martinez-Escudero et al., 2023). Additionally, for all respondents: (a) were Spanish, as well as their parents and grandparents, (b) their participation was voluntary, (c) anonymity of responses was guaranteed, (d) parental consent was required for adolescents, and, (e) informed consent was mandatory.

## Measures

### *Parenting styles*

Parental warmth was assessed with the 20 items of the Warmth/Affection Scale (WAS) (Rohner et al., 1978). The WAS scale evaluates children's perception of the degree of warmth, affection, care, and involvement that they received from their parents. Examples of items are: "Make it easy for me to tell them things that are important to me" or "Say nice things to me when I deserve them". High scores indicate a high degree of warmth. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the WAS scale .946. The strictness dimension was measured with the 13 items of the Parental Control Scale (PCS) (Rohner et al., 1978). The PCS assesses the degree to which children perceive parental control as being exercised in a firm, imposing, and demanding way. Examples of items are: "It makes sure that I know exactly what I can and can not do" or "Believes in having a lot of rules and sticking to them". Higher scores indicate a higher level of parental strictness. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the PCS scale was .901. The WAS and PCS use a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 "rarely true" to 4 "almost always true". For adult offspring, the adult version of the WAS and PCS scale were used, items are the same as for adolescents, but written in past tense. Examples of items of the adult version of the PCS scale were: "Made it easy for me to tell them things that were important to me" or "Said nice things to me when I deserved it". An example of items of

PCS adult version scale were: "It make sure that I know exactly what I can and cannot do" or "They believe in having a lot of rules and sticking to them". Both adolescent and adult versions of the WAS and PCS scales have good psychometric properties (Gomez & Rohner, 2011; Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner & Khaleque, 2003). The factorial structure of the Adult Version was confirmed by CFA analysis being a reliable and valid measure to measure parental socialization in adult properties (Khaleque & Rohner, 2012; Rohner & Pettengill, 1985; Senese et al., 2016).

The four parenting styles were defined based on the median scores on both dimensions (warmth and strictness) simultaneously controlling sex and age group allowing the classification of the families into each of the four typologies: neglectful (below the median in both dimensions); indulgent (with scores above the median on warmth and below the median on strictness); authoritarian (with below median scores in warmth and above median scores in strictness) and authoritative (with scores above the median on both dimensions) (Garcia & Serra, 2019; Gimenez-Serrano et al., 2022; Villarejo et al., 2020). The classification of families into parenting styles has been widely applied in parenting literature (Fuentes et al., 2015; Gimenez-Serrano et al., 2022; Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994). The split procedure (e.g., tertile or median) is sample-specific, as it categorizes families according to the distribution of scores on main parenting dimensions within the sample while controlling for sociodemographic variables such as sex, age, and culture (Chao, 2001; Garcia & Gracia, 2009; Queiroz et al., 2020; Steinberg et al., 1994). As such, the families categorized as "authoritative" are guaranteed to be more authoritative (i.e., more strict and warmer) than the other families within this study's sample, but this is uncertain whether the families categorized as "authoritative" in another sample or at a different historical moment. Therefore, this classification procedure serves a heuristic purpose which is sample specific rather than acting as a diagnostic measure (Alcaide et al., 2023; Lamborn et al., 1991; Valente et al., 2017).

### *Psychological Adjustment*

**Social self-concept** was measured with the 6 items of the social scale of the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale AF5 (Garcia & Musitu, 1999; Garcia et al., 2018a). The AF5 social scale assesses individual self-perceptions of performance in social relationships both in ease of establishing, maintaining, and extending

interpersonal relationships and in the presence of the quality of being friendly and sociable. An example of an item is: "It is difficult for me to talk to strangers" (reversed item). The Likert-type response scale has a wide range of answers from 1 "strongly disagree" to 99 "strongly agree". The AF5 scale is widely used as a multidimensional measure of self-concept. Its factor structure has been tested with confirmatory factor analysis (Bustos et al., 2015; Garcia et al., 2011; Murgui et al., 2012; Tomás & Oliver, 2004) as well as the invariance of the original Spanish and the one developed in Portuguese from Portugal (Garcia et al., 2006) and Brazil (Garcia et al., 2018a), in English (Garcia et al., 2013) and more recently, Chinese (Chen et al., 2020). The five-dimensional factor structure of self-concept used in AF5 Questionnaire has also been confirmed in adolescents (Fuentes et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2013, 2018a) and adults (Garcia et al., 2006; Tomás & Oliver, 2004). High scores involve a high social self-concept. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .795.

**Self-esteem** was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale is composed of ten items that evaluate feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance. An example of an item is: "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself". The scale uses a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 4 "strongly agree". The RSE has shown good psychometric properties in adolescents (Solera et al., 2024; Tomás et al., 2016) and adults (Gómez-Lugo et al., 2016; Martín-Albo et al., 2007). High scores are related to a high sense of self-esteem. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .854.

**Emotional unresponsiveness** was measured with the 6 items of the Emotional unresponsiveness subscale of the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) (Rohner, 1978). The subscale evaluates the lack of ability to express emotions freely and openly to others. An example of an item is: "It is hard for me when I try to show the way I really feel to someone I like". The response scale is based on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 "rarely true" to 4 "almost always true". The PAQ questionnaire has been used in 23 nations across five continents involving 33,081 respondents and both PAQ adolescent and adult versions have good psychometric properties (Ali et al., 2015; Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). High scores express a greater sense of emotional unresponsiveness. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .725.

**Empathy** was assessed with the 5 items of the empathy scale of the Psychosocial Maturity Questionnaire subscale (CRPM3) (Garcia & Serra, 2019; Greenberger

et al., 1975). This subscale measures the degree to which subjects understand and are sensitive to others. An example of an item is: "I am sensitive to others' feelings and needs". The response scale is based on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 "very inappropriate for me" to 5 "very suitable for me". The questionnaire has been commonly used in studies with adolescents and adults (Ertema et al., 2025; Garcia & Serra, 2019; Gimenez-Serrano et al., 2022; Martinez-Escudero et al., 2020). High scores indicate greater empathy. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .678.

**Benevolence** was assessed with the 5 items of the benevolence scale of the Schwartz Values Inventory (SVI) (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz, 1992). This scale assesses and evaluates the priority toward self-transcendence values, including concern for the wellbeing of others and the capacity for forgiveness. Examples of items are: "Responsible (Reliable)" or "Forgiving (Willing to pardon others)". The response scale is based on a Likert-type scale with a wide range, ranging from 1 "not at all important in my life" to 99 "essential in my life". The Schwartz Values Inventory has been widely used throughout the world in studies with adolescents and adults and provides an accurate measure for assessing social values (Martinez & Garcia, 2007; Paez & De-Juanas, 2015; Schwartz, 1994; Spini, 2003). High benevolence scores are related to high levels of benevolence values. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .733.

### Data Analysis

A multivariate factor analysis MANOVA ( $4 \times 2 \times 4$ ) was applied, the dependent variables were psychosocial adjustment criteria (social self-concept, self-esteem, emotional unresponsiveness, empathy, and benevolence values) whereas the independent variables were parenting style (authoritative, indulgent, authoritarian and neglectful), sex (women and men), and age group (adolescents, aged 12-18; young adults, aged 19-35; middle-aged adults, aged 40-59; and older adults, over 60 years). Multivariate main and interaction effects were tested. Univariate ANOVAs were then carried out for multivariate significant sources ( $\alpha < .05$ ), and the Bonferroni post hoc test ( $\alpha = .05$ ) was applied on univariate statistically significant differences for comparison of pear means.

## Results

### Parenting style groups

Participants were classified into one of four parenting typologies: indulgent ( $n = 608$ ; 29.1%) authoritative ( $n = 452$ ; 21.7%); authoritarian ( $n = 584$ ; 28.0%) and neglectful ( $n = 443$ ; 21.2%) (see Table 1). On parental

families scored higher than children from authoritarian homes ( $M = 54.99$ ;  $SD = 10.01$ ) and neglectful ( $M = 57.22$ ;  $SD = 9.30$ ) families. On the other hand, in terms of parental strictness, children from authoritarian families ( $M = 41.94$ ,  $SD = 5.46$ ) and authoritative ( $M = 39.91$ ;  $SD = 4.93$ ) families scored higher than the children from indulgent ( $M = 28.46$ ;  $SD = 5.42$ ) and neglectful ( $M = 28.57$ ,  $SD = 5.79$ ).

**Table 1**

*Distribution of participants according to parenting style, and mean scores and standard deviation on parenting dimensions.*

	Total	Indulgent	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Neglectful
Frequency	2087	608	452	584	443
Percentage	100	29.1	21.7	28.0	21.2
Parental Warmth					
Mean	64.74	73.69	72.66	54.99	57.22
SD	11.46	4.44	4.14	10.01	9.30
Parental Strictness					
Mean	34.74	28.46	39.91	41.94	28.57
SD	8.31	5.42	4.93	5.46	5.79

warmth, children from indulgent families ( $M = 73.69$ ;  $SD = 4.44$ ) and authoritative ( $M = 72.66$ ,  $SD = 4.14$ )

### Multivariate analysis

Results from the multivariate analysis (see Table 2) showed statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = .05$ ) for the three main effects: parenting styles,  $\Lambda = .810$ ,  $F(15, 5662.3) = 29.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ; sex,  $\Lambda = .912$ ,  $F(5, 2051.0) = 39.37$ ,  $p < .001$  and age group,  $\Lambda = .925$ ,  $F(15, 5662.3) = 10.84$ ,  $p < .001$ . Additionally, statistically significant differences were also found in the interaction effects between parenting styles by age group,  $\Lambda = .969$ ,  $F(45, 9177.7) = 1.43$ ,  $p < .005$  and sex by age group,  $\Lambda = .984$ ,  $F(15, 5662.3) = 2.19$ ,  $p < .005$ .

**Table 2**

*Multivariate factorial analysis of variance MANOVA ( $4^a \times 2^b \times 4^c$ ) for the indicators of psychosocial adjustment: social self-concept, self-esteem, emotional unresponsiveness, empathy and benevolence.*

Sources of variation	$\Lambda$	$F$	$df_{\text{numerator}}$	$df_{\text{denominator}}$	$p$	$\eta_p^2$
(a) Parenting Styles	.810	29.87	15.0	5662.3	<.001	.073
(b) Sex	.912	39.37	5.0	2051.0	<.001	.088
(c) Age	.925	10.84	15.0	5662.3	<.001	.028
Parenting Styles $\times$ Sex	.990	1.40	15.0	5662.3	.137	.004
Parenting Styles $\times$ Age	.969	1.43	45.0	9177.7	.031	.007
Sex $\times$ Age	.984	2.19	15.0	5662.3	.005	.006
Parenting Styles $\times$ Sex $\times$ Age	.978	1.00	45.0	9177.7	.465	.005

(a) Parenting styles: a<sub>1</sub> indulgent, a<sub>2</sub> authoritative, a<sub>3</sub> authoritarian, a<sub>4</sub> neglectful.

(b) Sex: b<sub>1</sub> female, b<sub>2</sub> male.

(c) Age: c<sub>1</sub> adolescents (12–18 years), c<sub>2</sub> young adults (19–35 years), c<sub>3</sub> middle-aged adults (36–59 years), and c<sub>4</sub> older adults (60 years and older).

### Sex and age differences

The main effects for sex and age reached statistical significance (see Table 3 and Table 4). Regarding sex-related differences, males had greater scores on self-esteem and emotional unresponsiveness than females, whereas females scored higher than males on empathy and benevolence. Regarding age-related differences, the highest scores on self-esteem were reported by middle-

aged adults, followed by young adults and older adults while adolescents had the lowest rates. Adolescents, young and older adults obtained greater emotional unresponsiveness than middle-aged adults. Young and middle-aged adults showed more empathy than adolescents. Finally, the highest benevolence was found in middle-aged adults, the lowest in adolescents, and middle levels in young and older adults.

**Table 3**

Means and (standard deviations), univariate *F*-values and Bonferroni's test between female and male for indicators of psychosocial adjustment: social self-esteem, self-esteem, emotional unresponsiveness, empathy and benevolence.

Sex	Female	Male	<i>F</i> (1, 2055)	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Social self-concept	7.13 (1.48)	7.17 (1.50)	1.27	.257	.001
Self-esteem	3.21 (0.48)	3.29 (0.46)	18.015	<.001	.009
Emotional unresponsiveness	2.09 (0.61)	2.25 (0.58)	40.45	<.001	.019
Empathy	4.04 (0.56)	3.78 (0.59)	103.58	<.001	.048
Benevolence	8.21 (1.13)	7.80 (1.19)	39.35	<.001	.019

**Table 4**

Means and (standard deviations), univariate *F*-values and Bonferroni's test<sup>#</sup> according to age group for indicators of psychosocial adjustment: social self-esteem, self-esteem, emotional unresponsiveness, empathy and benevolence

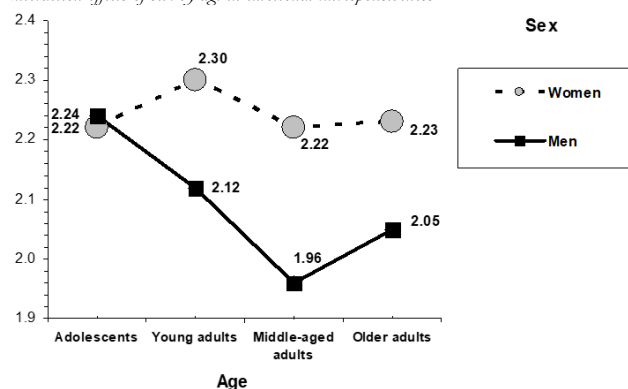
Age group	Adolescents (12-18 years old)	Young adults (19-35 years old)	Middle-aged adults (36-59 years old)	Older adults (≥ 60 years old)	<i>F</i> (3, 2055)	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Social self-concept	7.21 <sup>a</sup> (1.54)	7.11 <sup>a</sup> (1.42)	7.22 (1.43)	7.01 <sup>a</sup> (1.56)	2.35	.071	.003
Self-esteem	3.14 <sup>c</sup> (0.48)	3.26 <sup>b</sup> (0.51)	3.34 <sup>a</sup> (0.41)	3.25 <sup>b</sup> (0.43)	15.37	<.001	.022
Emotional unresponsiveness	2.22 <sup>a</sup> (0.59)	2.19 <sup>a</sup> (0.63)	2.05 <sup>b</sup> (0.56)	2.14 <sup>a</sup> (0.59)	6.97	<.001	.010
Empathy	3.88 <sup>b</sup> (0.57)	4.01 <sup>a</sup> (0.56)	3.98 <sup>a</sup> (0.57)	3.84 (0.65)	8.99	<.001	.013
Benevolence	7.76 <sup>c</sup> (1.23)	7.95 <sup>b</sup> (1.11)	8.25 <sup>a</sup> (1.01)	8.01 <sup>b</sup> (1.16)	17.96	<.001	.026

<sup>#</sup> Bonferroni test  $\alpha = .05$ ; 1 > 2 > 3 > 4; a > b

An interaction effect of sex by age was found in emotional unresponsiveness,  $F(3, 2055) = 4.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .007$  (see Figure 1). Females tended to score lower than males in the three adult age groups, but not in adolescence (no differences were observed). Among females, those in middle age had the most positive scores on emotional unresponsiveness whereas those in adolescent group had the most negative scores. In contrast, males have relatively similar, albeit negative, rates of emotional unresponsiveness in all four age groups.

**Figure 1**

Interaction effects of sex by age in emotional unresponsiveness



### Parenting styles

Statistically significant differences were found in all the psychosocial criteria variables depending on parenting styles (Table 5). Overall, parenting styles based on warmth were related to more optimal scores than parenting characterized by lack of warmth. Specifically, the highest levels of social self-concept were reported by children from indulgent and authoritative homes while children from authoritarian and neglectful families had the lowest levels. Regarding differences on self-esteem, indulgent and authoritative parenting were associated with greater scores than authoritarian and neglectful parenting. Again, parenting characterized by warmth was associated with more positive scores in emotional unresponsiveness: children from authoritarian and neglectful families (lack of warmth) had the highest emotional unresponsiveness whereas the lowest levels were reported by their peers from indulgent and authoritative households (high in warmth). Regarding differences in empathy, children raised by indulgent and authoritative families showed higher scores than those with authoritarian and neglectful parents. In fact, neglectful parenting was related to the lowest levels of empathy. Regarding differences in benevolence, children from indulgent and authoritative families obtained higher scores than their counterparts from authoritarian and neglectful homes.



**Table 5**

Means and (standard deviations), univariate *F*-values, and Bonferroni's test<sup>#</sup> for parenting styles on the indicators of psychosocial adjustment: social self-esteem, self-esteem, emotional unresponsiveness, empathy and benevolence.

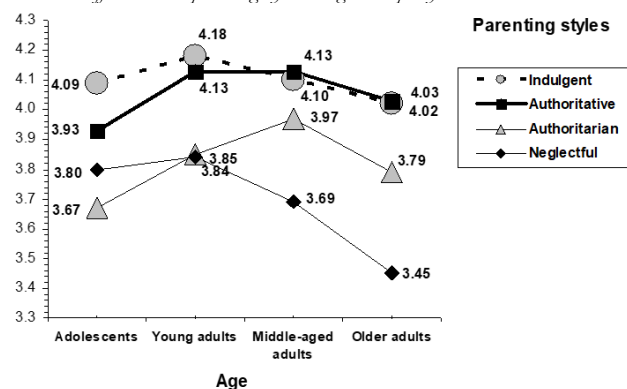
Parenting styles	Indulgent	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Neglectful	<i>F</i> (3, 2055)	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Social self-concept	7.42 <sup>a</sup> (1.36)	7.42 <sup>a</sup> (1.43)	6.92 <sup>b</sup> (1.52)	6.78 <sup>b</sup> (1.52)	26.65	< .001	.037
Self-esteem	3.36 <sup>a</sup> (0.45)	3.35 <sup>a</sup> (0.40)	3.10 <sup>b</sup> (0.50)	3.16 <sup>b</sup> (0.45)	47.37	< .001	.065
Emotional unresponsiveness	1.95 <sup>b</sup> (0.56)	1.95 <sup>b</sup> (0.54)	2.35 <sup>a</sup> (0.58)	2.40 <sup>a</sup> (0.56)	97.43	< .001	.125
Empathy	4.10 <sup>a</sup> (0.50)	4.06 <sup>a</sup> (0.52)	3.82 <sup>b</sup> (0.62)	3.72 <sup>c</sup> (0.63)	55.28	< .001	.075
Benevolence	8.29 <sup>a</sup> (0.98)	8.15 <sup>a</sup> (1.04)	7.79 <sup>b</sup> (1.21)	7.63 <sup>b</sup> (1.21)	39.73	< .001	.055

<sup>#</sup> Bonferroni test  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; 1 > 2 > 3 > 4; a > b

A statistically significant interaction effect between parenting by age was found in empathy,  $F(3, 2055) = 3.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .014$ . Family comparisons within age showed that adult offspring (young, middle-aged, and older adults) raised by indulgent and authoritative parents obtained greater empathy than their peers from the other households, although adolescents from indulgent parents have relatively greater scores than those from authoritative homes. On the opposite side, non-warm parenting was related to poor empathy across age, although authoritarian parenting, compared to the neglectful style, was associated with relatively lower scores in adolescence, similar levels in young adulthood, and greater rates in middle-aged and older adults.

**Figure 2**

Interaction effects between parenting style and age on empathy.



## Discussion

This study examined the relationship between the two-dimensional model with four parenting styles (indulgent, authoritative, authoritarian, and neglectful) and psychosocial adjustment of Spanish children through five indicators (social self-concept, self-esteem, emotional unresponsiveness, empathy, and benevolence) in the short-term (adolescents, when socialization is in process) and long-term (young, middle-aged and older adults, when socialization is over). Differences in psy-

chosocial adjustment were found as a function of parenting style. Overall, children from families characterized by warmth (indulgent and authoritative) obtained the best scores in all criteria. In contrast, children from families characterized by non-warmth (authoritarian and neglectful) reported poor scores in said criteria. Interestingly, the so-called positive parenting (i.e., authoritative parenting), mainly identified in studies with European-American families, would be expected to be related with the highest psychosocial adjustment. Previous studies comparing families characterized by warmth (i.e., authoritative and indulgent parenting) have found that there are benefits, but also serious detriments in adjustment (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994). The present study suggests that parental warmth is associated with good psychosocial adjustment, while strictness seems to be unnecessary and even detrimental if not accompanied by the warmth dimension.

Confidence in oneself and in their own abilities is a main objective of socialization necessary for children to live in society (Baumrind, 1978; Maccoby, 1992). Two indexes of self-perceptions were examined in the present study, one about recognizing oneself as a valuable person (self-esteem) and the other about their own abilities to adequately make relationships with others (social self-concept). According to previous classical European-American studies, warmth would be especially positive for self-perceptions. In this sense, European-American children from authoritative homes have the greatest self-esteem and social self-perceptions, although their peers from indulgent families would obtain similar positive scores because they benefit from acceptance and involvement (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994). The findings of the present study showed that the adolescent and adult offspring who reported the highest self-esteem and social self-concept were those from homes with involved, loving parents who reinforced the child's individuality, regardless of differences in parental strictness (authoritative and indulgent families), in line with some recent studies



conducted in Europe (Fuentes et al., 2022; Perez-Gramaje et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2023).

Additionally, emotional unresponsiveness represents an important problem in emotional regulation (Berry & Pennebaker, 1993; Gross, 1998). According to the present study, findings showed differences in emotional unresponsiveness depending on parenting style. The results revealed that adolescents and adult offspring who were raised in homes characterized by lack of warmth have serious emotional difficulties to adequately respond to emotional situations. By contrast, children raised by indulgent and authoritative parents (characterized by warmth) reported good emotional regulation in terms of lower emotional unresponsiveness. The present results did not confirm some previous classical research in which parental warmth would favour children's emotional regulation, and where the lack of the parental strictness would even undermine the benefits associated with high warmth (e.g., children of indulgent European-American parents report high levels of somatic distress, while children from authoritative homes report lower levels of somatic distress) (Lamborn et al., 1991). However, the present results about the benefits of parental warmth without parental strictness for emotional regulation agree with emerging lines of research conducted across Europe (García & Gracia, 2009; Martínez-Ferrer et al., 2018; Ortega et al., 2023), where children from indulgent families have higher scores in emotional regulation.

Empathy and internalization of social values represent the success of socialization (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Schwartz, 1992). The present findings showed that the most positive scores in empathy and social values of benevolence corresponded to adolescents and adult offspring raised in authoritative and indulgent households, both families characterized by warmth. The present results do not support previous research mainly conducted in European-American families, where strictness is necessary for children to adopt socially acceptable behaviours, in combination with warmth (Baumrind, 1983; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Milevsky et al., 2007). According to previous evidence mainly from European-American families of the US, adolescents with authoritative parents would show adequate social and few behavioural problems. Their peers from authoritarian homes would also benefit from the strictness component, by scoring well on obedience and conformity to social standards but would receive detriments due to lack of warmth by having lower prosocial orientation in terms of, for ex-

ample, empathy (Baumrind, 1991; Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 2006). However, other studies are in line with the present findings showing that empathy (Fuentes et al., 2022) and internalization of social values (Martínez et al., 2020) is fostered by warmth even without strictness (i.e., indulgent parenting).

Internalization by one generation (e.g., children) of the social values transmitted by the preceding generation (e.g., parents) represents the conservative force in society. For years there has been debate about the best way for parents to effectively socialize competent children, with good self-esteem, self-regulation, and social responsibility. Overall, most parenting research supports the idea that parental strictness, when coupled with parental warmth, promotes effective socialization. Baumrind (1983) argued that responsive parenting (e.g., reasoning, and inductive discipline) alone was insufficient and ineffective for instrumental competence (e.g., self-esteem and emotional regulation) and internalization (incorporating social values that guide subsequent behaviour) if not combined with strategies based on parental demand and authority. Although some developmental theorists suggested that the strictness component was superfluous and only warmth is necessary (see Lewis, 1981), they were not supported by evidence (Baumrind 1983). The present study did not confirm previous evidence that strict parenting (e.g., monitoring and punishments when children do not conform) may be especially beneficial because it helps them understand the consequences of their behaviours.

In recent years, Europe and especially Spain have served as a kind of cultural laboratory to test whether the results on the positive effects of the authoritative style were universally generalizable context (Axpe et al., 2023; Calafat et al., 2014; García et al., 2019; Reyes et al., 2023; Riquelme et al., 2018). The present study, in line with some emergent findings, seriously questions that parental strictness, characteristic of the authoritative parenting style, might be always necessary for positive socialization in any cultural context (García et al., 2024, 2020b; Palacios et al., 2022; Villarejo et al., 2024). It is possible that warmth is especially positive in a cultural context characterized by collectivism in which the family is of great importance, children who feel loved and valued by the family might internalize the socializing message of their parents and have a good development. But, at the same time, relationships between parents and children tend to be more egalitarian, so that parental strictness could be unnecessary when warmth is accompanied by warmth (authoritative parenting)

and harmful without warmth (authoritarian parenting) (Martinez et al., 2021; Rudy & Grusec, 2001).

The results confirm some sex- and age-related differences identified in previous studies (Fuentes et al., 2022; Garcia et al., 2018b; Villarejo et al., 2024). Interestingly, regardless of the different developmental time (e.g. adolescence or late life) of men and women, the years of socialization seem to draw a relatively common profile of the relationship between psychosocial adjustment and parental socialization styles. Results about parenting by age from the present study revealed that parental warmth was constantly associated with high empathy, particularly for adolescents when is combined with low strictness (i.e. indulgent parenting) rather than with strictness (i.e., authoritative parenting). Overall, the present results seem to suggest that it is parental warmth and not strictness that promotes good psychosocial adjustment, not only when the socialization process is still taking place, but also when it is over, which goes in line with recent evidence mainly from European and South American countries (Garcia et al., 2019). Adolescence is a stage with some degree of greater psychosocial vulnerability compared to childhood and adulthood (Gallegos et al., 2021; Mañez et al., 2024; Veiga et al., 2023). However, even beyond adolescence differences in adult adjustment can be consistently related to parenting styles. Thus, another important contribution of the present study is that the widely assumed idea of developmental theorists about the importance of early experiences for adult development has been empirically tested.

The present work contributes new empirical evidence to parental science. The model of two orthogonal dimensions (warmth and strictness) and four parenting styles (authoritative, indulgent, authoritarian, and neglectful) is widely used around the world to identify positive parenting for children's psychosocial adjustment. Likewise, the present study examines psychosocial competence through indicators widely used in family studies. However, many previous studies mainly with social orientation indicators have been limited to studying empathy and its relationship with parenting practices or styles as a category (e.g., authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive), but without identifying them as dimensions (Eisenberg et al., 2015). Additionally, the present study also tests the relationship of parenting styles not only in adolescents but also in three groups of adult offspring.

Some cautions should be considered. The methodology of the present research was cross-sectional and non-experimental. Even though early experiences in the family have been frequently examined through cross-sectional designs on studies with adult offspring using the same reliable and valid measures as for adolescents (Ali et al., 2015), to make causal statements regarding parenting styles and outcomes, future research could opt for experimental and/or longitudinal designs. Although the data of the present study come from cross-sectional data, the common methodology from previous studies with adult offspring has been used in this study based on the same measures of parenting as for adolescents, but with statements in past tense (Ali et al., 2015; Buri, 1991). In addition, longitudinal studies have related parenting to developmental differences in adult offspring (Aquilino & Supple, 2001; Axpe et al., 2023; Flouri, 2004; Moran et al., 2018). Finally, the data are reported in all cases by the adolescents and adult offspring and not by the parents, although children seem to offer more accurate measures than parents (Barry et al., 2008; Gonzales et al., 1996).

## Conclusions

The theoretical model based on the two dimensions and four parenting styles is a very useful model as it has been widely used to study parental socialization and children's adjustment. Recent research has been suggesting that parenting highly influences (positively or negatively) children's development, even beyond adolescence. Even though it is suggested that the cultural context in which socialization occurs may affect optimal parenting (e.g., the benefits of parental strictness in combination with parental warmth is suggested for middle-class European-American families), the present study offers new insights regarding parental warmth potentially compensating for the negative effects of parental strictness in younger as well as adult offspring.

## Complementary information

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