


Parental Child Rearing Practices in Palestine: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to explore parenting practices from the perspectives of Palestinian parents and their children, and concordance between parents and children in their reports of parenting practices, in a culture that is underrepresented in the literature. A descriptive cross-sectional design was used. The Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ) was administered to 120 parents and 120 children drawn from 4 districts in Palestine. Children had higher scores on parental involvement, positive parenting, poor monitoring, inconsistent discipline, and corporal punishment. Three significant parent–child relationships were obtained: parental involvement ($r = .276$, $P = .003$), positive parenting ($r = .0301$, $P = .001$), and poor parental monitoring ($r = -.241$, $P = .008$). The findings of this study might be used by Palestinian authorities and policy-makers to formulate guidelines and training to aid parental decision-making about child rearing.

Keywords

child rearing, parental perception, rearing practices, school-aged children

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Background

Intended to aid children to develop normally, child-rearing practices differ from one society to another as they are shaped by parental culture, conceptions, and social and economic circumstances.¹ As defined by Ekpo and Igbokwe,² child-rearing practices mediate children's social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual development by ensuring that their basic needs, including education, love, material needs, and welfare, are met. Furthermore, through the child-rearing practices that they adopt, parents help children to embrace the culture and customs of the society they were born into.³ Parental culture has a massive influence on the perceptions that parents hold about child-rearing practices, discipline, and behavioral regulation. Parents encounter many difficulties in getting their offspring ready to cope with the problems and complexity of life, so child rearing is a tremendous undertaking.⁴ Consequently, parents draw on their own experiences and their understanding of cultural conceptions, including morality, when they raise their offspring.²

Developmental psychologists consider that children's social world and the manner in which they develop cognitively and emotionally are critically dependent on child-rearing practices.⁵ Learning by observation or emulation is advocated by social cognitive theory as a major driver of development.⁶ This implies that children acquire learning from observation of what their parents and others do and what the results of their actions are.⁷

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Thus, from this perspective, child behavior is molded first and foremost by the parents.

Review of the Literature

Child-rearing practices mediate progress from 1 phase of development to the next, and therefore they are essential to how children develop.⁸ The impact of these practices is felt not only on how children behave and on their personality,⁹⁻¹¹ but also on how children perform in school and how they develop emotionally, psychologically, socially, and physically.¹¹⁻¹³

Depending on their effects on how children develop cognitively, psychologically, and emotionally, 2 types of child-rearing practices can be distinguished, namely, positive and negative practices. For instance, child development is favorably influenced by parental involvement. As reported by Barnard¹⁴ and Stright and Yeo,¹⁵ children's performance in school is improved when parents actively participate in their day-to-day activities, such as attendance of school activities, parent meetings, and activities outside school. On the other hand, children might be negatively affected emotionally and behaviorally if parents get excessively involved in every little aspect of their children's lives. Aboobaker et al¹⁶ accentuated this issue in an investigation of the determinants of emotional and behavioral troubles among Indian teenagers; findings indicated that the teenagers were adversely affected emotionally due to excessive parental involvement.

Burlaka¹⁷ argued that positive child-rearing practices can support children to learn to communicate effectively, which is an essential career-aiding skill. Similarly, in a study on 286 undergraduate students, Baker and Hoerger¹⁸ reported that the participants who received affection from their parents were more successful in regulating themselves, acquiring effective interpersonal skills (eg, the ability to open up, engage with and trust others) and adapting to academic life (eg, resilience and patience in achieving academic goals). Furthermore, irrespective of age, children are more emotionally and behaviorally stable when they interact favorably with their parents.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Legate et al²⁰ examined how children's bullying behavior was shaped by parenting styles and observed that cyberbullying behavior was demonstrated more often by teenagers exposed to a rigid and controlling style of parenting than by teenagers exposed to a parenting style emphasizing independence and support.

Frick²¹ documented a close correlation between lack of consistency in discipline and behavioral problems among teenagers. Likewise, Aboobaker et al¹⁶ indicated

that the way in which Indian teenagers behaved could be most accurately anticipated based on lack of consistency in discipline. Meanwhile, in their US study on 135 couples living together and having children in the age range 6 to 12 years old, Gryczkowski et al²² explored how children's externalizing behavior was shaped by the child-rearing practices employed by the mothers and fathers. They reported that children were more likely to exhibit increased externalizing behavior due to lack of consistency in the discipline exercised by their mothers rather than their fathers. Additionally, in a study conducted in Australia, Duncombe et al²³ also found that disruptive behavior was intensified by lack of consistency in discipline.

Children can be adversely affected in a number of ways by an authoritarian style of parenting. Melis Yavuz and Selcuk²⁴ investigated a sample of Turkish children of preschool age to determine whether obese or overweight status could be anticipated based on parenting styles and child-feeding practices. According to the results, the risk of obesity was higher among children whose mothers exercised an authoritarian style of parenting. Furthermore, Baker and Hoerger¹⁸ reported that lack of trust and somatic disorders caused by distress stemmed from parental ostracism and excessive control associated with impaired self-regulation, problems with adjustment and psychopathology.

Burlaka et al¹⁷ noted that parental neglect and inadequate supervision had negative effects in terms of children's care and guidance needs, school attendance, and practical support, increasing the probability of behavioral issues, non-compliance with rules, aggressive behavior, and attention issues.²⁵⁻²⁷ By contrast, children are less likely to engage in risk-taking behavior if their parents monitor them appropriately.²⁸ Moreover, as suggested by Aboobaker et al,¹⁶ teenagers are more likely to develop prosocial skills under close parental watch.

An aspect of child-rearing practices associated with a number of unfavorable implications is corporal punishment, which is considered a major factor ongoing occurrence of violence in society.²⁹ In a study conducted in the US on children with mothers of average age of 28.11 years old, Mulvaney and Mebert³⁰ reported that corporal punishment was significantly correlated with negative behavioral adjustment. In a different US study on 2582 parents and their children in fifth and sixth grade, McKee et al³¹ established a connection between child problem behaviors and severe verbal and physical discipline. Nevertheless, the damaging effects of severe physical discipline were attenuated by the favorable parental practice of expression of affection.

In addition, in a Spanish study on 1071 children, Gámez-Guadix et al³² discovered that children were more prone to behaving in an antisocial manner if they had been punished physically, such as by being caned or flogged.

The Situation in Palestine

In the Middle Eastern country of Palestine under the occupation, children account for around 50% of the total population and the socio-economic standing of about a quarter of the population (25.7%) is low.³²⁻³⁴

The politically unstable environment in which they live affords a singular character to the life conditions of children in Palestine and their psychological development might be adversely impacted as a result. An investigation of the social, individual, familial, and educational determinants of children's mental health under circumstances of armed conflict revealed that children and their families were often mentally traumatized, but the extent to which children were vulnerable varied.³⁵ Therefore, in such regions, child-rearing practices contribute massively to help children deal with the difficulties caused by poor mental health.

However, living under conditions of armed conflict can also have an impact on parents and, implicitly, on the child-rearing practices and discipline measures that they implement. In a comparative analysis of the strategies employed by mothers in Qatar and Palestine to enforce discipline, Kamal et al³⁶ discovered that the physical and psychological strategies of discipline used by mothers in Palestine were more severe than those used by mothers in Qatar. The authors attributed this difference to the privation and suffering experienced by mothers in Palestine and the fact that they were younger and less well-educated.

Ample research in the field of developmental psychology conducted particularly in the West highlights the significant impact of child-rearing practices on children's development. By contrast, this topic has not been extensively studied in a Palestinian setting and the majority of existing studies explore child-rearing practices not from the children's point of view but from the parents' point of view.³⁶ The present study sought to address this limitation by investigating child-rearing practices for children of school age from the viewpoints of both parents and children and comparing those viewpoints. In line with this aim, the study had 2 objectives, namely, to characterize conceptions and practices of child-rearing from the viewpoints of parents and children in Palestine and to examine correlations among those viewpoints.

Methodology

Design

To address the stated objectives, the study adopted a research design widely applied in nursing studies, namely, a cross-sectional descriptive correlational design. The advantage of this type of design is that it facilitates not only the investigation of inter-variable correlations at particular points, but also the collection of data regarding the features of groups, circumstances, or the rate at which variables occur.³⁷

Sample and Setting

The eligible participants were parents (mother and father as a couple) and their middle school and adolescent children between 9 and 15 years who lived in 1 of 4 targeted districts in Palestine (ie, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jenin, and Hebron). These participants were interviewed as a couple simultaneously. Participants had to read and write Arabic. Children aged 6 to 8 years were excluded from the study because they might not fully understand the questions or be able to read and write properly. Additionally, parents and children with physical or cognitive impairments were not included in the study.

Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data for this study: the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ) and an investigator-developed demographic data form. The APQ was used in this study for several reasons: (1) its widespread use as a measure for assessing parenting practices,³⁸ (2) its standardization for use in different countries (eg, Germany, Spain, Qatar), and (3) its applicability in different settings, including community and clinical referred samples.

This scale was designed to measure 5 parenting constructs: parental involvement, positive parenting, poor monitoring/supervision, inconsistent discipline, and corporal punishment.^{39,40} This questionnaire contains 84 questions, 42 for parents and 42 for children, that cover various aspects of parenting practices based on a 5-Point Likert scale.

The literature has already established this scale's validity and reliability.⁴¹⁻⁴⁴ The instrument was translated to Arabic according to World Health Organization⁴⁵ guidelines and then was sent to a professional translator to perform double-blind back translation. To ensure its compatibility with the local culture, a pilot study was carried out to make sure that the Arabic version was reliable. The internal consistency for this version was

measured using Cronbach's alpha. The values obtained were .68 for parental involvement, .71 for favorable child-rearing practices, .72 for suboptimal supervision, .75 for lack of consistency in discipline, and .75 for corporal punishment.

Data Collection

Participants were recruited through parental meetings held within governmental schools in each district. These parental meetings usually take place upon invitation by schools, especially at significant times during the study year, for example after exams and activities, and the end of the year. Researchers asked parents if they would agree to participate in this study with their children. Additionally, information sheets and recruitment flyers concerning this study were distributed during such meetings.

The parents who agreed to participate in the study were asked to discuss this with their children to confirm their approval and then give the researcher their contact information. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to the parents and children (250 for children and 250 for parents). Of those, 252 were returned completed, giving a response rate of 50%. This response rate was attributed to participants' busy schedules. However, according to Salant et al⁴⁶, a response rate of 50% to 60% is to be expected from general public samples. Of the completed questionnaires, 12 were not included in the analysis because they had missing data. Thus, a total of 240 questionnaires (120 parents and 120 school-aged children) were left for analysis.

Data Analysis

The derived data were analyzed using SPSS program Version 20.0. Descriptive statistics portrayed participants' demographic characteristics and current child-rearing practices from the parents' and the children's perspectives. Several inferential correlation tests, including bivariate Pearson correlation analysis, explored the relationship between parent and child regarding their practice with other variables using the Alabama questionnaires (APQ), which separate questions into 5 sub-groups (ie, involvement, positive parenting, poor monitoring, inconsistent discipline, and corporal punishment).

Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from participants and the ethical committee of Birzeit University and the Palestinian Ministry of Education. Participants completed a written consent form, and researchers clarified that all the

Table 1. Participant's Characteristics.

Parents characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Under 30	30	25.0
	30-50	75	62.5
	Over 50	15	12.5
Gender	Male	60	50.0
	Female	60	50.0
Education level	High school	48	40.0
	Diploma	38	31.7
	Bachelor	29	24.2
	Master	5	4.2
Residence	Village	95	79.2
	Camp	4	3.3
	City	21	17.5
The city	Jerusalem	29	24.2
	Ramallah	28	23.3
	Jenin	30	25.0
	Hebron	33	27.5
Marital status	Married	116	96.7
	Divorce	2	1.7
	Widowed	2	1.7
Religion	Islam	120	100
	Christianity	0	
	other	0	
Child characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	10-11	75	62.5
	12-13	30	25
	14	15	12.5
Gender	Male	52	43.3
	Female	68	56.7

N [parents] = 120, N [child] = 120.

collected data would be used for the research purpose and accessed only by the research team, with the potential for publication without reference to individual names.

Results

Demographics

There was a total of 240 participants in this study: 120 parents and 120 school-aged children (Table 1). The sample involved families from the Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, and Jenin districts. Regarding parents' characteristics, half were female (50%), and most were between 30 and 50 years old (63%), with a high school education (40%). Most lived in a rural area (79%) and were married (97%). All mothers were Muslim (100%). As regards the children, most (63%) were in the age range 10 to 11 years old and females made up more than half of the sample (57%).

Table 2. The Perspective of Parents and Children on the Rearing Practices.

Item	Mean	SD	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Children					
Involvement	59.6	10.6	47	37	84
Positive parenting	22.5	4.5	17	13	30
Poor monitoring	20.2	6.6	28	10	38
Inconsistent discipline	14.9	3.4	14	8	22
Corporal punishment	7.5	2.8	11	3	14
Parents					
Involvement	40.6	10.6	47	18	65
Positive parenting	16.5	4.5	17	7	24
Poor monitoring	10.2	6.6	28	1	28
Inconsistent discipline	8.9	3.4	14	2	16
Corporal punishment	4.5	2.9	11	1	11

N [parents]= 120, N [child]= 120.

Perspectives of Children and Parents Toward Child-Rearing Practices

The results of parenting practices showed that the most frequent parenting practice as perceived by children was involvement 59.6 (SD=10.6) and the lowest was corporal punishment 7.5 (SD=2.8). In relation to separate items, the highest score was for “Your parents calmly explain to you when your behavior was wrong” (M=3.6), and the lowest was “Your parents make you sit or stand in a corner as a punishment” (M=1.6).

For parents, the results were similar. The highest score for parenting practices as perceived by parents was for involvement 40.6 (SD=10.6), and the lowest was for corporal punishment 4.5 (SD=2.9). The separate items were the same as children. The highest score was for “You calmly explain to your child why his behavior was wrong” (M=3.2), and the lowest one was “You make your child stand or sit in a corner as a punishment” (M=1.7).

The data from parents’ and children’s perspectives regarding parenting practices showed there was concordance for involvement, as it had the highest rate from children and their parents (M=59.6, SD=10.6) and (M=40.6, SD=10.6), respectively. However, children rated involvement higher than their parents. This indicated that children perceived sharing parents in their activities more than parents’ perspectives (Table 2).

Relationship Between Parents’ and Children’s Perspectives of Rearing Practices

A bivariate Pearson correlation analysis was performed to assess the associations among involvement, positive parenting, poor monitoring, inconsistent discipline and corporal punishment of parents, according to children’s

views. Results showed that a child’s perceived involvement is significantly and positively correlated with parents’ perceived involvement ($r=.276, P=.003$). Concerning positive parenting from the child’s perspective, it was significantly and positively correlated with involvement ($r=.0301, P=.001$) and negatively correlated with poor monitoring from parents’ perspectives ($r=-.241, P=.008$).

Poor monitoring from the child’s perspective was significantly and negatively correlated with involvement ($r=.221, P=.015$). Moreover, inconsistent discipline was significantly and positively correlated with poor monitoring ($r=.182, P=.047$). This indicated more inconsistent discipline is linked with high poor monitoring. In general, these results showed agreement between children and their parents regarding rearing practices (Table 3).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess and compare child-rearing perspectives and practices for school-aged children from parents and children’s perspectives. A cross-sectional quantitative approach was used whereby parents and their children were recruited during parental school meetings to participate in this study. The results of the present study suggest that parents and children generally agree on their reports of parenting, but they also provide variability in their perspectives of parenting practices.

The results of parenting practices showed that the most frequent parenting practice as perceived by children was involvement and the lowest was corporal punishment. This is congruent with a study conducted,¹⁵ which examined (712) children’s perceptions of mothers’ parenting styles and maternal involvement to

Table 3. The Correlations Among the Parents and Their School Aged Children Perspectives Around the Child Rearing Practices.

Category	Involvement child	Positive parenting child	Poor monitoring child	Inconsistence discipline child	Corporal punishment child
Involvement parent	$r = .267 (.003)$	$r = .301 (.001)$	$r = -.221 (.015)$	$r = .028 (.764)$	$r = -.051 (.578)$
Positive parenting	$r = .161 (.079)$	$r = .302 (.001)$	$r = -.048 (.606)$	$r = .116 (.209)$	$r = .051 (.577)$
Poor monitoring	$r = -.142 (.123)$	$r = -.241 (.008)$	$r = .545 (P < .001)$	$r = .182 (.047)$	$r = .214 (.019)$
Inconsistence discipline	$r = -.01 (.912)$	$r = -.065 (.480)$	$r = .156 (.089)$	$r = .121 (.189)$	$r = .286 (.002)$
Corporal punishment	$r = .076 (.410)$	$r = .034 (.716)$	$r = .047 (.613)$	$r = .141 (.124)$	$r = .100 (.275)$

N [parents]= 120, N [child]= 120).

Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

predict their school achievement and conduct in Singapore.

The findings of the current study indicated that Palestinian parents reported using of positive parenting practices toward their children. The relatively old age of the parents might explain such favorable outcomes to some extent. Most parents were aged between 30 and 50 years old, meaning that they were no longer at the stage of young adulthood at which parenting difficulties of a health, physical, and psychological nature are more likely to be confronted. From this perspective, the study corroborates the results reported by Burlaka et al,¹⁷ which indicated that child-rearing practices in Ukraine were markedly influenced by the age of the parents.

The findings of the current study showed that the association found in the present study indicates that children, compared to parents, had significantly higher scores for involvement, positive parenting, poor monitoring, inconsistent discipline, and corporal punishment. Stright and Yeo¹⁵ reported relatively similar findings in their Singapore investigation of how children's perception of their mothers' parenting style affected their school conduct and achievements. The findings showed that the children typically perceived their mothers' parenting styles very positively, reporting that their mothers were warm and used moderate amounts of behavioral control and less psychological control.

Although the least-used parental style was corporal punishment from the parents' and children's perspective, it suggests that some parents used some corporal punishment. There is a possibility that this result may be underreported by comparison to earlier studies by Burlaka²⁵ in the Ukraine and Gershoff et al⁴⁷ in the US, which indicated that corporal punishment was used on a regular basis by 75% to 80% of parents. The reason behind this difference might be explained as Palestinian parents are more likely to report positive behavior, which could relate to the influence of social desirability effects, as bad parental practice is criticized in sociality.

This study had some limitations that should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design used in this study need cautious interpretation of the results especially as the parents depends on recall of previous parenting practices. Additionally, the sampling approach was convenience, which limits the ability to generalize findings among all the families in the Palestinian community. Furthermore, the sample was selected from a governmental school meeting, which might imply potential sampling bias. Other factors include the data collection process, a shortage of resources, length of the questionnaire, and difficulty of transportation. Another limitation of this study include that the data was drawn from only 4 districts in Palestine and that the study used participants' self-reports. Using other resources of information such as report from other family members and observing parents' behaviors in the real context might strengthen the results. This study recommends conducting further qualitative studies or perhaps mixed method studies to demonstrate the cultural aspect of parenting in Palestine. Additionally, the absence of a significant relationship between analyzed correlations may be due to the nature and small size of the sample. Generally, the parents provided low scores for their practices compared with children.

It is important that the policy maker and health care providers being aware of these parenting pattern to provide culturally based intervention to diminish them. The current study provides crucial information for developing critical and culturally sensitive interventions with parents in Palestine. One of the most important issues is to make these interventions to be affordable to parents who live in poverty with lower socioeconomic background. The most important message for Palestinian parents is to learn to avoid corporal punishment for their children, supervise and actively participate in the lives of their children and to motivate their good behaviors. Finally, for the health professionals who work in those parents to acknowledge the potential adverse impact of the political issues on parents.

Palestinian policy makers should further support parents' capacity to conduct their child rearing role through conducting training sessions and workshops. Moreover, corporal punishment was still reported, albeit infrequently. Therefore, there is a need to incorporate legislation to protect children and monitor parents' practices in this area.

Moreover, professionals who work with children and their families, including teachers, social workers, nurses, and doctors, must assess children's and parents' needs concerning rearing practices, with attempts to support them and help them to avoid problems. They also need to assess children's developmental needs and their holistic family environment.

Further studies are needed to enhance the evidence concerning child-rearing practices in the Palestinian community. For instance, there is a need for more surveys to explore the perspective of high-income parents and their children and investigate their rearing practices. In the current study, we did recruit parents from a governmental school, and those parents (parents with high incomes) were expected to be missed. Moreover, there is a need for a larger scale quantitative study that investigates parental rearing practices' influence on children's behavior and psychology in the Palestinian community. There is also a need for qualitative studies to investigate parents' child rearing practices from a closer perspective to explore when parents use each parenting style and if any factors influence their practice.

Summery

This study investigates Palestinian parents' and children's perceptions of parenting practices and suggested parents and children generally agree on their reports of parenting, but they have some degree of variability in their perspectives for certain parental practices. The unique strength of this study is its contribution to the current gap in this area. It is also the first study in Palestine that investigates child-rearing practices from children's perspective. Professionals and policy makers in Palestine might incorporate the results of this study to develop guidelines and training that aim to help parents' decisions regarding how to raise their children.

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Author Contributions

All authors had the major input into the design, analysis, and interpretation of the data, as well as drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content. All authors have seen and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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