



To share, or not to share? The effects of parenting communication styles and sharenting on young adults' mental health

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ABSTRACT

The increasing prevalence of parents sharing their children's personal information on social media, known as sharenting, has raised concerns about its potential impact on young adults' privacy, autonomy, and mental health. Despite growing scholarly interest, research examining the consequences of sharenting on young adults' mental health remains limited. Grounded in Baumrind's Theory of Parenting Styles, this study investigates the relationship between parenting communication styles, sharenting practices, and the mental health of Malaysian young adults. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 205 respondents through purposive sampling. The findings reveal that parenting styles significantly influence young adults' mental health, with authoritative and permissive parenting showing positive associations, while authoritarian and neglectful parenting being linked to poorer mental health outcomes. However, sharenting did not have a significant direct effect, suggesting the need for further exploration of factors such as cultural attitudes, digital literacy, and frequency of exposure. These findings highlight the critical role of parenting communication styles in shaping mental well-being and emphasise the importance of mindful digital parenting. Future research should expand on these findings by incorporating more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and qualitative approaches to capture a deeper understanding of the evolving parent-child dynamic in the digital age.

Keywords: *Sharenting, parenting communication style, digital parenting, digital exposure, social media*

INTRODUCTION

Sharenting can be seen as an evolution of the more traditional parenting methods such as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful parenting, each having its own distinct implications towards the parent-child relationship (Makwana et al., 2023). However, despite the growing discourse on the ethical dilemmas of sharenting, there remains a gap in research regarding the long-term consequences of sharenting on young adults (Doğan-Keskin et al., 2023). Moreover, the digital nature of sharenting necessitates further investigation to better understand its psychological and social effects (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024).

In the Malaysian context as a collectivist culture, cultural values strongly influence parental decisions regarding online sharing (Doğan-Keskin et al., 2023; Hashim et al., 2021). This can be seen in the desire to maintain close relationships and to create community bonds through frequent interactions on platforms like social media (Hashim et al., 2021; Sahharon et al., 2024). However, according to Lo et al. (2020), a notable gap exists in localised research, particularly on how the evolution of traditional practices on parenting styles may affect a child's mental health. These gaps underscore the need for further research on how sharenting practices affect the mental health outcomes of young adults.

Drawing upon Baumrind's theory on parenting communication styles, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between parenting communication styles and sharenting practices on the mental health of Malaysian young adults. The objectives of this study are threefold. Specifically, this study aims to determine (1) the relationship between parental communication styles and mental health of young adults, (2) the relationship between sharenting on social media and mental health of young adults, and (3) the relationship between parental communication, sharenting on social media and mental health of young adults.

Based on these objectives, this study hypothesised that different parenting communication styles, including authoritarian (H1), authoritative (H2), permissive (H3), and neglectful (H4), have a significant effect on the mental health of young adults. Additionally, it is also hypothesised that sharenting has a significant effect on the mental health of young adults (H5).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parenting style and Baumrind's theory have been major themes in developmental psychology, drawing a great deal of scientific interest (Fadlillah & Fauziah, 2022). Diana Baumrind's foundational work in the 1960s defined three basic parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, with the neglectful style added later by Maccoby and Martin in the 1980s (Li, 2024). These styles are defined by the degree of responsiveness and demandingness that parents demonstrate towards their children (Dalimonte-Merckling & Williams, 2020).

The authoritative parenting style is characterised as a method that is high in responsiveness and demandingness, which has been consistently associated with positive developmental outcomes (Abundis-Gutierrez, 2018). Research done by Hayek et al. (2022) corroborated the findings from Baumrind's which showed children who were raised by authoritarian parents perform better socially, academically and as well as socially.

According to Tiwari (2022), authorities have strengthened the belief that a balanced approach to parenting, including warmth and discipline, is the most effective way to promote healthy growth.

On the contrary, the authoritarian parenting style that is characterised by its low responsiveness and high demandingness, has been linked to producing quite adverse outcomes in different aspects (Vasiou et al., 2023). Findings from Chen (2022) highlighted the possible detrimental effects this method has on children's self-esteem and independence, suggesting that the authoritarian approach may contribute to an increase of anxiety and violence among young children. This also highlights the important role of giving children parental warmth and responsiveness in promoting healthy outcomes.

The permissive parenting style is known for its characteristic of being high in responsiveness but also having low demandingness (Cherry, 2022). This has often been associated with various outcomes such as feeling of entitlement as well as being irresponsible and unaccountable (Harris, 2024). While children with permissive parents may seem to benefit from having experienced high levels of warmth and freedom from their parents, research from Heger (2023) suggests that children under permissive households may struggle with high levels of anxiety and self-control issues.

Neglectful parenting is a style that is much defined by its low levels of both responsiveness and demandingness and is the subject that has been of growing concern. Beck Aguilera et al. (2023) found that this parenting produces negative consequences, such as increased risk of children's behavioural problems and developmental delays. These findings have prompted requests for initiatives to help parents and reduce the overall negative effects inattentive parenting could do to a child (Mikolajczak et al., 2019).

Drawing upon Baumrind's initial typology of parenting styles and dimension, this research combines it with the evolution of the typology by Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin in the 1980s. By doing so, this extends understanding on not just the normal range of parenting communication styles but also includes a more deviant pattern of communication style among parents. By incorporating sharenting into the framework in Figure 1, it reflects the evolution from the initial conceptualisations of parental communication styles to the more current practices in parental communication.

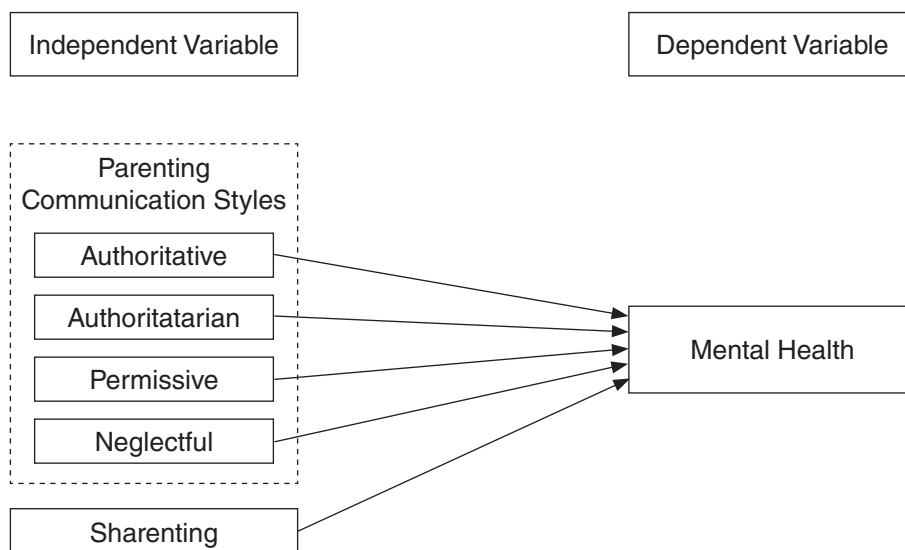


Figure 1. The revised framework of parental communication styles

Sharenting

The emerging practice of “sharenting”, is an occurrence where parents sometimes share detailed information on their journey of parenting (Kopecky et al., 2020). It is the act of exposing their children’s information, story and photos online, particularly through social media platforms such as Instagram and Tiktok (Doğan-Keskin et al., 2023). Studies found that parents often share content of their children to seek validation from other parents in the community (Wardhani & Sakarasih, 2021). However, these practices have raised concerns regarding children’s independence, privacy and confidentiality (Noiseux et al., 2018). Further, scholars like Ugwudike et al. (2024) argue that sharenting could violate children’s digital footprint and consent in the future.

Miller-Ott et al. (2023) highlighted the lack of clear guidelines for parents regarding appropriate online sharing. Their study calls for consensus-driven approaches that balance children’s privacy rights with the benefits of social media for community engagement and family connection (Miller-Ott et al., 2023). Ranzini et al. (2020) found that uncontrolled sharenting adversely affects children’s peer relationships and self-esteem, with long-term implications as children become increasingly aware of their digital presence. Esfandiari and Yao (2022) noted that children may develop anxiety and embarrassment over content shared by parents on social media, highlighting the importance of fostering open family communication in digitally active households.

Effect of authoritative parenting style on mental health

A study done by Romero-Acosta et al. (2021) established a strong correlation between authoritative parenting style and the positive mental health outcomes in children, where depression and anxiety are observed less. An environment created by parents with authoritative methods plays a huge role in the development of positive coping mechanisms in children. Teuber et al. (2021) expanded these findings by presenting an idea that adolescents raised in authoritative households are more likely to showcase better academic motivation and achievements. These outcomes are associated with their parents’ encouraging independence and supportiveness (Hidayanti et al., 2023).

Liu et al. (2020) mentioned the importance of parents having a role in fostering open communication with their children. Regular, sympathetic talks in authoritative households, helps children to understand their own feelings and experiences, while also strengthening their mental health resilience (Liu et al., 2020). Further, the emotional safety fostered by parents who practise authoritative methods protects adolescents from stress and peer-related issues (Zarra-Nezhad, 2019).

Effect of authoritarian parenting style on mental health

Authoritarian parenting, characterised by high demandingness and low responsiveness (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019), has been linked to negative mental health outcomes across cultures. Azman et al. (2021) found that this style contributes to mental health challenges, with children often experiencing heightened anxiety and depression (Echedom et al., 2018). Bi et al. (2018) reported decreased self-esteem and increased psychological distress in adolescents raised in authoritarian households, likely due to limited warmth and autonomy (Krauss et al., 2020).

This style has also been associated with academic stress. Gao (2023) found that strict obedience and high academic expectations in authoritarian families can lead to

burnout. Cultural context plays a role, however; in some settings, authoritarian traits may be seen as caring and motivating (Yim, 2022). This suggests a need for cultural sensitivity when evaluating parenting impacts (Makwana et al., 2023). However, research agrees that authoritarian parenting can harm mental health. Children raised under strict control often exhibit higher anxiety and lower social competence (Garcia et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2019). Biernesser et al. (2020) also linked authoritarian digital control with emotional alienation and depression, showing its influence extends into online behaviours.

Effect of permissive parenting style on mental health

Permissive parenting, marked by high responsiveness and low demandingness (Cherry, 2022), is associated with warmth and emotional openness. Children in permissive households often show higher self-esteem and better social skills (Aziz et al., 2021), and greater autonomy in expressing their identity (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). However, this approach may hinder self-discipline and impulse control (Kong & Yasmin, 2022).

Research also links permissiveness with academic and behavioural challenges. Baidoo-Anu et al. (2019) noted that such children often struggle academically and engage in risk-taking behaviours. A lack of structure may lead to poor motivation and a sense of irresponsibility (Shengyao et al., 2024). Mental health effects are mixed; although the environment may seem nurturing, adolescents may still experience anxiety and depression due to inconsistent guidance and difficulty navigating social norms (Moore, 2017; Rakhshani et al., 2022).

Effect of neglectful parenting style on mental health

Neglectful parenting, low in both responsiveness and demandingness (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019), is often marked by parental disengagement and failure to meet children's emotional or psychological needs (Cherry, 2022). It is widely associated with adverse mental health outcomes. Marici et al. (2023) reported higher rates of depression, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness among children from neglectful homes. Such children often feel emotionally abandoned (Salavera et al., 2022), which undermines self-esteem and psychological resilience (Holland, 2019).

Long-term effects have also been documented. Dou et al. (2020) found a link between neglectful parenting and emotional disorders, delinquency, and substance abuse. These children frequently experience poor academic performance and social difficulties due to limited supervision and emotional support (Goagoses et al., 2023; Harris, 2024; Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018). Neglect can also impact adult mental health, as individuals raised in such environments report ongoing psychological challenges (Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008; Chaudhary et al., 2023).

Effect of sharenting on mental health

“Sharenting,” a blend of “sharing” and “parenting,” refers to the frequent posting of children's personal information, photos, and videos by parents on social media platforms (Meliani et al., 2023; Tan & Dhanapal, 2022). While some scholars highlight its role in fostering community support and enabling parents to share experiences (Verswijvel et al., 2019), others caution against its adverse implications. Recent research underscores potential harm to children's mental health, particularly regarding privacy, consent, and autonomy (Doğan-Keskin et al., 2023). As children mature, they may feel discomfort or

embarrassment over past content shared by parents, which can contribute to anxiety and diminished self-esteem (Doğan-Keskin et al., 2023; Hashim et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Walrave et al., 2022). Moreover, sharenting has been associated with heightened risks of cyberbullying and online exploitation, further endangering children's psychological well-being and their trust in parental judgment (Bezáková et al., 2021; Real Research Media, 2023; Tan & Dhanapal, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between parenting communication styles, sharenting practices, and the mental health of Malaysian young adults. The quantitative method enables the collection of objective data that can be generalised through statistical analysis (Campbell et al., 2020; Williams, 2021).

The target population comprised Malaysian young adults aged 18 to 40. According to the 2007 Youth Societies and Youth Development Act (2014), youth in Malaysia are defined as individuals aged 15 to 40. As of 2024, Malaysia's youth population is estimated at 14.68 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024; Institute for Youth Research Malaysia, 2024). This study specifically targeted individuals who had experienced diverse parenting communication styles in their upbringing. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who met predefined inclusion criteria: Malaysian young adults (18–40 years old) with exposure to various parenting styles (Hossan et al., 2023; Thomas, 2022). G*Power analysis determined a minimum sample size of 138 to ensure statistical power (Faul et al., 2007). However, 205 valid responses were collected, exceeding this threshold.

Data were collected through a structured survey distributed via social media using Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised seven sections and 36 items. Section 1 captured demographic data. Sections 2 through 7 measured parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful), sharenting, and mental health. Items on mental health were interspersed across sections to examine its correlation with each independent variable.

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used for data analysis, including reliability testing and correlation analysis, due to its robust statistical capabilities (Hair et al., 2019). A pilot study with 26 participants (12% of the main sample) was conducted to assess the instrument's reliability and validity. This aligns with literature suggesting 20–30 participants for pilot testing (Abdulameer et al., 2020; Cocks & Torgerson, 2013; Malhotra, 2020).

Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (Taber, 2018). Parental communication constructs demonstrated acceptable to excellent reliability, ranging from $\alpha = 0.703$ (authoritative) to $\alpha = 0.892$ (authoritarian). Sharenting also showed strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.875$). The mental health scale achieved an α value of 0.709, meeting the threshold for social science research (Hair et al., 2019; Malhotra, 2020).

Table 1. Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) (N=26)

Construct	Chronbach's alpha	Items
Authoritarian	0.892	6
Authoritative	0.703	5

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Construct	Chronbach's alpha	Items
Permissive	0.827	5
Neglectful	0.854	6
Sharenting	0.875	5

Parenting communication styles measurement

To measure parenting communication styles, this study adopted Diana Baumrind's foundational typology of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive styles (Sirait & Slameto, 2024), along with the neglectful style later expanded by Maccoby and Martin in the 1980s (Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008; Estlein, 2016; Louis, 2022; Venkatesh et al., 2019). These four parenting dimensions were assessed using a 6-point Likert-type scale, which has been shown to prompt more deliberate responses by discouraging neutrality (Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2018).

Authoritative parenting was measured through items such as “my parents enforce rules on me without asking what I think,” “my parents pay attention to my opinion,” and “my parents' support and guidance has helped me cope with stress.” Authoritarian items included “my parents punish me by taking my privileges away,” “my parents use criticism to improve my behaviour,” and “my parents yell or shout when I misbehave.”

Permissive parenting was assessed using items like “my parents give in to my desires when I throw a tantrum,” “my parents ignore my bad behaviour,” and “my parents' support but lack of behavioural control has helped me cope with stress.” Neglectful parenting was measured through statements such as “my parents use threats without giving reasons,” “my parents do not try to understand my feelings,” and “my parents' lack of support and encouragement has helped me cope with stress.”

Sharenting measurement

Sharenting was measured with questions such as “my parents often shared pictures or videos of me on their social media profile”, “my parents often write on social media about me”, “my parents often share photographs or videos that may cause frustration and/or embarrassment to me.”, “I feel like my privacy is invaded when my parents share my photographs or videos on social media.”, and “my parents' oversharing about me on social media has helped me cope with stress”.

Mental health measurement

The mental health variable in this study was assessed through measures of “my parents' support and guidance has helped me cope with stress”, “my parents' guidance and lack of support has helped me cope with stress”, “my parents' being supportive but having lack of control over my behaviour has helped me cope with stress”, “my parents' lack of control over my behaviour has helped me cope with stress”, “my parents' lack of support and encouragement has helped me cope with stress” and “my parents oversharing about me on social media has helped me cope with stress”. These questions were incorporated into each independent variable section of the survey to examine their correlation with other key variables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 presents the demographic background of respondents, showing a balanced gender distribution with 4.9% opting not to disclose their gender. Most participants were aged 18–23 (85 respondents), followed by those aged 24–29 (72 respondents). The majority identified as Malay (78.1%), with smaller representations from other ethnicities.

Table 3 indicates that authoritative parenting had the highest mean score ($M = 4.13$), suggesting it is the most prevalent parenting style perceived by respondents. This aligns with findings that authoritative parenting fosters self-efficacy, autonomy, and goal orientation (Hayek et al., 2022; Tiwari, 2022). Conversely, sharenting recorded the lowest mean ($M = 2.95$), implying it is less commonly practised. This supports prior studies highlighting privacy, consent, and autonomy concerns in digital parenting (Doğan-Keskin et al., 2023), possibly due to an increasing awareness of children's digital rights and the risks of oversharing.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics (N=205)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	95	46.3
Female	100	48.8
Prefer not to say	10	4.9
Age		
18–23	85	41.5
24–29	72	35.1
30–35	17	8.3
36–40	31	15.1
Ethnicity		
Malay	157	78.1
Chinese	21	10.4
Indian	16	7.9
Bajau	1	0.5
Kadazan	1	0.5
Bugis	2	1
Iban	2	1
Rungus	1	0.5

Table 3. Parental communication styles (N=205)

Construct	M	SD
Authoritarian	3.5423	1.144
Authoritative	4.1343	0.846
Permissive	3.2090	1.061
Neglectful	3.3433	1.032
Sharenting	2.9453	1.257

Correlation analysis of parenting styles and mental health

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between parenting communication styles and mental health. As shown in Table 4, all five parenting styles were significantly correlated with mental health ($p < .05$). The strongest correlation

emerged between neglectful parenting and mental health ($r = .694$), suggesting that lack of parental support strongly undermines young adults' mental well-being. Sharenting also showed a strong correlation ($r = .684$), highlighting potential mental health risks linked to excessive parental sharing online (Doğan-Keskin et al., 2023; Tan & Dhanapal, 2022).

Table 4. Relationship between parenting communication styles and mental health

Variable(s)	r-value	p-value
Authoritarian	3.5423	1.144
Authoritative	4.1343	0.846
Permissive	3.2090	1.061
Neglectful	3.3433	1.032
Sharenting	2.9453	1.257

Regression analysis of parenting styles and mental health

To further explore the impact of parenting styles on mental health, a multiple regression analysis was conducted (Table 5). Authoritative parenting emerged as a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .440$, $p < .001$), suggesting that warmth and clear expectations are associated with higher well-being—consistent with literature on emotional resilience and autonomy (Tiwari, 2022). In contrast, authoritarian parenting was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.345$, $p < .001$), reinforcing links to increased anxiety and stress due to emotional suppression (Bi et al., 2018). Permissive parenting showed a positive relationship ($\beta = .211$, $p = .003$), indicating that autonomy may enhance psychological well-being, though it may also impair emotional regulation (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2018). Neglectful parenting had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.224$, $p = .011$), highlighting risks tied to emotional insecurity and disengagement (Holland, 2019). Sharenting was not a significant predictor ($\beta = .029$, $p = .722$), implying its influence on mental health may be limited or mediated by factors like digital literacy or perception of online exposure (Doğan-Keskin et al., 2023; Liu, 2023).

Table 5. Multiple regression analysis on parenting communication styles and mental health

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p-value
(Constant)	3.055	0.395	—	7.730	<.001
Authoritarian	-0.389	0.088	-0.345	-4.406	<.001
Authoritative	0.675	0.108	0.440	6.245	<.001
Permissive	0.251	0.083	0.211	3.040	0.003
Neglectful	-0.273	0.107	-0.224	-2.554	0.011
Sharenting	0.030	0.083	0.029	0.356	0.722

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the effects of parenting communication styles and sharenting, on the mental health of young adults in Malaysia aged 18 to 40 years old. The findings of this study highlight the complex relationships between parenting styles and mental health. The predominance of authoritative parenting among Malaysian parents suggests

that most young adults grow up in supportive and structured environments, which are associated with positive mental health outcomes. Despite the negative connotation authoritarian parenting often receives, results show a moderate positive correlation with mental health, suggesting that it may foster resilience in some individuals. However, regression analysis indicate that when authoritarian parenting becomes excessively rigid or punitive, it has a detrimental effect on well-being.

Neglectful parenting had the strongest positive correlation with mental health, a surprising finding that diverges from existing literature. This suggests that certain aspects of what is perceived as neglect, such as increased independence, may actually be beneficial for some young adults. However, the regression analysis still confirmed that neglectful parenting, when extreme, has a negative effect on mental health. This discrepancy highlights the need for further exploration into different forms of neglect and their distinct psychological consequences.

The results also indicate that sharenting, despite being a growing digital phenomenon, does not have a significant direct effect on mental health within this sample. This suggests that other moderating variables, such as personal digital literacy or parental discretion in online sharing, may influence the extent to which sharenting affects young adults' well-being. These findings underscore the need for further research on how emerging digital parenting practices shape mental health outcomes in different cultural contexts.

This study faced several limitations that should be acknowledged. One key limitation is the relatively small sample size, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the sample was not fully representative of the broader 18–40 age group in Malaysia, as the majority of respondents were from the dominant ethnic group and fell within the 18–30 age range. This may have led to an underrepresentation of the experiences of minority subgroups and older participants. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response bias, as participants may have provided socially desirable answers or misjudged their own experiences and mental health status.

Future research should expand the sample size and improve demographic diversity by including participants from various ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, educational levels, and geographic regions, particularly ensuring greater representation of individuals aged 30 to 40 years old. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term effects of different parenting styles, especially the unexpected findings regarding neglectful parenting, and to explore potential moderating factors in the relationship between sharenting and mental health, such as digital literacy and cultural attitudes. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews and case studies, could provide deeper insights into the complexities of parenting styles and psychological well-being. Additionally, given that sharenting showed no significant effect on mental health in this study, future research should explore other aspects of digital parenting, including cyberbullying, parental monitoring, and young adults' perspectives on their online presence, to better understand the broader implications of growing up in a digital environment.

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