



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Child Abuse &amp; Neglect

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/chiabuneg](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/chiabuneg)

# Maternal negative emotional expression and discipline in Beijing, China: The moderating role of educational attainment

Feng Cheng, Yifang Wang\*, Xixian Wu, Zhuqing Su

Beijing Key Laboratory of Learning and Cognition, School of Psychology, Capital Normal University, Beijing, China



## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Maternal  
Negative emotional expression  
Discipline  
Educational attainment

## ABSTRACT

The current study shows that parental punitive discipline places children at risk of developing internalizing and externalizing problems. Although some studies have analyzed the reasons for the use of discipline methods, little to no research has analyzed the moderating effects. In this study, we examine the relationship between maternal negative emotional expression and mothers' use of disciplinary methods (psychological aggression, corporal punishment and physical maltreatment) and the moderating effects of educational attainment in Chinese societies. Five hundred and sixteen mothers with preschool-aged children were recruited to participate in this research. The Chinese versions of the Self-Expressiveness in the Family Questionnaire (SEFQ) and the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales (CTSPC) were used to measure the mothers' negative emotional expression and discipline, respectively. The results suggested that the mothers' negative emotional expression was positively related to their disciplinary behaviors. Moreover, maternal educational attainment moderated the association between negative emotional expression and discipline. The findings of the current study highlight the importance of considering how mothers' educational backgrounds may interact with their emotions to influence maternal disciplinary behaviors.

## 1. Introduction

A recent study of Chinese participants found that psychological aggression (PA), corporal punishment (CP) and physical maltreatment (PM) remain prevalent parental disciplinary techniques in modern Chinese families: more than 80% of mothers and 75% of fathers with children aged 3–6 years reported using PA, and approximately 54% of mothers and 48% of fathers reported using CP. In addition, 15% of mothers and 13% of fathers used PM during their children's preschool years (Wang & Liu, 2014). The above-mentioned disciplinary methods may have short-term advantages in decreasing the rates of misbehavior, but in the long term, it appears to exert more negative effects than positive effects on children (Larzelere, 2000; Mckinney, Milone, & Renk, 2011). For e.g., many studies conducted by Gershoff suggested only one positive result of the use of physical discipline: immediate compliance. All other outcomes were significantly negative (e.g., aggression, poor mental health, lower levels of moral internalization and antisocial behavior) (Gershoff, 2002, 2010; Gershoff, Lansford, Sexton, Daviskean, & Sameroff, 2012). Recent research with a Chinese sample found that parental PA and CP were related to children's anxiety (Wang, Liu, & Jin, 2015; Wang, Wang, & Liu, 2016; Xing & Wang, 2013). Similarly, a 5-year longitudinal study of a sample of 702 dyads of children aged 6–9 years and parents in Chinese societies found that parental harsh discipline predicted subsequent externalizing behavior in children (Wang & Liu, 2017).

To prevent and intervene in negative discipline and reduce its harmful effects on child development, researchers have attempted

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [wangyifang6275@126.com](mailto:wangyifang6275@126.com) (Y. Wang).

to identify the reasons underlying the use of disciplinary methods. A growing body of research demonstrates that parents' negative emotions undermine effective discipline (Dix & Meunier, 2009; Wang, Xing, & Zhao, 2014; Xing, Zhang, Shao, & Wang, 2017); mothers who report intense anger, sadness, disappointment and similar negative emotions are less sensitive and more restrictive (Dix, Gershoff, Meunier, & Miller, 2004; Tenzer, Murray, Vaughan, & Sacco, 2006), and they prefer to use harsh, overreactive disciplinary methods (Leung & Slep, 2006; Slep & O'Leary 2007; Arnold & O'Leary, 1995; Lorber & O'Leary, 2005). Liu and Wang (2015) suggested that in Chinese societies, high levels of anxiety and distress in parents could interfere with the development of parents' adaptive coping skills, and parents are more likely to acknowledge using harsh discipline like PA and CP with their children.

To date, most studies on the relationship between parents' negative emotional expression (NEE) and their disciplinary behavior have been conducted in Western countries, and little research has examined this relationship in association with Chinese culture. Although previous studies have indicated that there are cultural differences in child-rearing practices, such as verbal interactions between mothers and infants, attachment and parenting-related cognition (Bornstein & Cote, 2004; Keller, Otto, Lamm, Yovsi, & Kärtner, 2008; Keller, 2013; Rubin & Chung, 2013), cross-cultural studies have provided evidence that emotional expression (especially negative emotion) and emotional behavior might be universal (Camras, Kolmodin, & Chen, 2008; Ekman, 1993; Soto, Levenson, & Ebling, 2005). In addition, the traditional concept of parenting holds that punitive discipline is an expression of love and concern (Li, Xue, Wang, & Wang, 2017; Wong et al., 2009), and Chinese parents have high expectations of their children, in terms of high academic performance, moral goals and the culturally valued concept of filial piety (Lin & Fu, 1990; Wang et al., 2014). It has been speculated that Chinese mothers may experience very intense negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression, which may contribute to more frequent use of negative disciplinary behaviors (Xing, Wang, Zhang, He, & Zhang, 2011).

Because mothers are typically the primary caregivers in China (Wong et al., 2009), the main research objective in our study is to examine the association between mother's NEE and their use of three types of discipline (PA, CP and PM).<sup>65</sup>

## 2. Maternal educational attainment (EA) as a moderator

Maternal education is viewed as a means of imparting appropriate knowledge and skills to improve the mother-child relationship and help mothers secure long-lasting advantages for their child's development, such as academic success and greater cognitive development (Augustine, 2014; Prickett & Augustine, 2016). Children whose mothers have lower education levels are at a greater risk of experiencing an array of academic, socioemotional and health problems (Gutman, Mcloyd, & Tokoyawa, 2005; Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Conger et al., 1991; Lam, 2011). For example, to examine the effect of mothers' education on children's health, Chen and Li (2009) conducted a study with a large sample of Chinese children. Their findings suggested that mothers' education level has a nurturing effect on children's health even when income and other socioeconomic variables are controlled. Lam (2011) suggested that although children are not directly affected by parental educational level itself, they are affected by related aspects of their parents' behavior.

The frustration-aggression model has been used to understand the association between maternal education and parenting behavior (Berkowitz, 1989). According to this model, EA is the primary factor that alleviates or exacerbates parenting stress via its influence on economic status. Specifically, higher levels of EA help mothers obtain higher-paying, higher-status work, which alters the distribution of family income (Karoly & Burtless 1995). Additionally, they receive more social support, which may relieve their parenting stress and enable them to manage their negative emotions more effectively, thereby reducing the use of punitive parenting. Less-educated mothers are more likely to face life dilemmas; they encounter more parenting frustrations and often experience more negative emotions, which make aggression and violence more likely (Berkowitz, 1989; Russell, 1994). Numerous previous studies have shown a link between frustration-aggression and EA and parenting (Carneiro, Meghir, Parey, & Cem, 2007). For e.g., Oreopoulos and Salvanes (2009) demonstrated that college-educated parents are less likely to use spanking and other forms of physical discipline than are less-educated parents. Using the Dimensions of Discipline Inventory to describe the discipline methods used by 234 mothers, Khoury-Kassabri and Straus (2011) found that the more-educated mothers reported less use of CP and PA than did less-educated mothers. In Chinese society, parents often make great investments in their children by providing them with large amounts of goods and services (Brown, 2006). The high levels of parental investment in child-rearing increase the challenges that parents face. Education is widely seen as a key determinant of future income and occupational attainment in modern China (Brown, 2006), and less-educated mothers are exposed to more economic hardships and experience more parenting stressors than more-educated mothers. Thus, less-educated mother may parent differently than well-educated mothers.

However, most prior research has focused primarily on the main effects of maternal EA on discipline, and there is a dearth of literature examining the moderating role of maternal EA in the relationship between maternal NEE and discipline. There are important theoretical reasons why maternal education might influence the association between mothers' NEE and their disciplinary actions. For instance, mothers with lower educational levels generally experience higher levels of parenting stress. This stress may cause mothers to feel more negative emotions, and mothers who experience negative emotions are likely to be more negatively sensitive and more likely to use negative disciplinary methods (Cummings, Keller, & Davies, 2005; Liu & Wang, 2015). Conversely, better-educated mothers may be less likely to use these negative disciplinary methods when they experience negative emotions. Therefore, we hypothesize that maternal EA may moderate the association between NEE and disciplinary actions, but there is no difference in the moderating effects for PA, CP and PM.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832073>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832073>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)