



## Which parenting style is more protective against adolescent substance use? Evidence within the European context



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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study examines whether authoritative parenting style (characterized by warmth and strictness) is more protective against adolescent substances use than authoritarian (strictness but not warmth), indulgent (warmth but not strictness) and neglectful (neither warmth nor strictness) parenting styles. Emergent research in diverse cultural contexts (mainly Southern European and Latin American countries) questions the fact that authoritative would always be the optimum parenting style.

**Design:** Multi-factorial MANOVAs.

**Participants:** A sample of 7718 adolescents, 3774 males (48.9%), 11–19 year-olds ( $M = 14.63$  year-olds,  $SD = 1.9$  years) from Sweden, United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic.

**Measurements:** Parenting style dimensions (warmth and strictness) and adolescent substance use (alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs); additionally another three adolescent outcomes were also measured (self-esteem, school performance and personal disturbances) all of them related in the literature with substance use.

**Findings:** Both indulgent and authoritative parenting styles were associated with better outcomes than authoritarian and neglectful parenting in all the countries studied. Overall, our results support the idea that in Europe the indulgent parenting style performs as well as the authoritative one since adolescents' scores in the youth outcomes were equal (on substance use and personal disturbances) or even better (on self esteem and school performance) than for authoritative parenting style.

**Conclusions:** Parenting styles relate to substance use and other outcomes in the same way in different countries explored. The so-called indulgent parenting style appears to be as good as the authoritative in protecting against substance abuse.

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### 1. Introduction

Data from both the United States and Europe suggest a high prevalence of substance use by adolescents (Conway et al., 2013; European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2012), which is relevant since risky substance use patterns expose adolescents to serious long-term health problems (Thompson et al., 2013).

Parental socialization has been hypothesized to be a major source of influence on protection against adolescent substance use (Adalbjarnardottir and Hafsteinsson, 2001; Alati et al., 2010;

Becoña et al., 2012a,b; Fernández-Hermida et al., 2012; García and Gracia, 2009; Harakeh et al., 2005; Hummel et al., 2013). Research examining relationships between parenting styles and youth's outcomes traditionally follows a two-dimensional framework with four-typologies of parental socialization styles. The combination *responsiveness* (warmth, acceptance, involvement) and *demandingness* (strictness, imposition, parental firmness; Adalbjarnardottir and Hafsteinsson, 2001; Cano et al., 2012; Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg, 2005; Steinberg et al., 1994; Turkel and Tezer, 2008), both theoretically orthogonal dimensions (Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Lamborn et al., 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Steinberg, 2005; Steinberg et al., 1994; Turkel and Tezer, 2008), defines four types of parenting styles known normally as: authoritative (warmth and strictness), authoritarian (strictness but not warmth), indulgent (warmth but not strictness), and

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neglectful (neither warmth nor strictness) (Darling and Cumsille, 2003; Steinberg et al., 2006).

Although both authoritative and authoritarian parents are defined by strictness, only the authoritative parenting style can exercise authority in a rational and flexible manner, encouraging communication and negotiation with children, and explaining their decisions to them. Thus, authoritative parents set clear limits while showing warmth and involvement to their children. The so called indulgent parents, like the authoritative ones, also foster an environment of acceptance, dialogue and affection; but when children disobey, indulgent families do not impose strict rules since they believe children can regulate their own behaviour through dialogue and reflection (García and Gracia, 2009; Lamborn et al., 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Rodrigues et al., 2013).

Research conducted mainly in Anglo-Saxon contexts with European-American samples has consistently recognized authoritative parents (i.e., harmonious warm and responsive parents that exert concurrently firm control and maturity demands) as the optimal parenting style since it is regularly associated with optimum outcomes on children and adolescents (Lamborn et al., 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Montgomery et al., 2008; Steinberg et al., 1994). Adolescents from authoritative households use less illegal drugs (Bahr and Hoffmann, 2010; Montgomery et al., 2008), are more resilient (Kritzas and Grobler, 2005), achieve better academic performance (Cohen and Rice, 1997; Im-Bolter et al., 2013), have better psychological competence (Lamborn et al., 1991), and better adaptive strategies (Aunola et al., 2000), and are less involved in the broad-spectrum of behaviour problems (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994). On the opposite side, adolescents with neglectful parents (neither warmth nor strictness) would perform worse in all those youth outcomes (Aunola et al., 2000; Lamborn et al., 1991; Montgomery et al., 2008; Steinberg et al., 1994). Finally, adolescents from authoritarian and indulgent homes score on all outcomes between the highest possible adjustment of the authoritative style and the lowest possible adjustment of the neglectful style. Adolescents from indulgent (warmth but not strictness) homes, may benefit in the area of psychosocial development but show higher rates of deviance (i.e., in the area of drug use and school performance; Lamborn et al., 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Steinberg et al., 1994).

A parenting styles approach includes overall long-time parenting characteristics, allows researchers to better integrate and organize specific parenting practices, and study accurately the relationships between parenting styles, parenting practices and their relations to children's psychosocial adjustment (Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Lamborn et al., 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Symonds, 1939). Indulgent parents, like the authoritative ones, also foster an environment of acceptance, dialogue and affection. As a result, adolescents from indulgent homes have a strong sense of self-confidence but also report higher frequencies of substance misuse and school misbehaviour, and show low performance in school (in the US, Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994). Although monitoring has initially been conceptualized as a parenting practice involving active attempts on the part of parents to watch over children as a means of firm control or strictness (shared by authoritarian and authoritative), lately theoretical and empirical work has noted the importance of distinguish between authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles (see Kerr and Stattin, 2000; Stattin and Kerr, 2000). Even though parental monitoring predicted a wide range of positive adolescent outcomes, most of this relationship was explained by adolescents' spontaneous disclosure of information to parents (authoritative), and not by parents' attempts to secure information (authoritarian; see Kerr and Stattin, 2000).

However, studies conducted in other ethnic and cultural contexts, cast doubt on whether the authoritative style of parenting is always associated with optimum adjustment of children and

adolescents. On the one hand, authoritarian style (strictness but not warmth) has proven more effective in the USA with ethnic minority groups (Baumrind, 1972; Chao, 1994; Deater-Deckard and Dodge, 1997; Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Wang and Phinney, 1998). Among African-American girls in the US, authoritarian parenting has been associated with independence and assertiveness (Baumrind, 1972). Amid Hispanic adolescents, authoritarian parenting has been highly related to adolescent engagement, whereas this effect was relatively weak for other subgroups (Steinberg et al., 1992). Additionally, results from studies with poor family households questioned the idea of the authoritative style of parenting being always associated with optimum outcomes among adolescents (Hoff et al., 2002). Among low-educated parents in the US and Australia, authoritarian parenting was positively related to academic achievement (Leung et al., 1998). With Chinese children, authoritarian parenting has been associated with satisfaction on the parent-child relationship (Quoss and Zhao, 1995) and, in Arab societies authoritarian parenting has shown not harm on adolescents' mental health (Dwairy et al., 2006).

On the other hand, the so-called indulgent style (warmth but not strictness) has proven effective mainly in South European and Latin American countries (Alonso-Geta, 2012; Di Maggio and Zappulla, 2014; García and Gracia, 2009, 2010; Gracia et al., 2012; Hindin, 2005; Kazemi et al., 2010; López-Romero et al., 2012; Turkel and Tezer, 2008; Wolfradt et al., 2003). Among Spanish families, indulgent parenting style was found to be as effective as the authoritative on or, sometimes, even better in all matters concerning self-esteem, psychological maladjustment, personal competence, and a broad-spectrum of problem behaviours (García and Gracia, 2009, 2010). Additionally, Spanish studies reported similar findings in sexist attitudes, level of stress, and psychopathic personality of adolescents, and child-to-parent violence (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2012; Garaigordobil and Aliri, 2012; López-Romero et al., 2012; de la Torre et al., 2011). Similar findings were also reported in Spain when measuring directly the parents' child-rearing behaviour, and different grades of neighbourhood violence (Alonso-Geta, 2012; Gracia et al., 2012). Other studies in Portugal, Turkey, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Mexico, Iran and Philippines reported similar findings (Di Maggio and Zappulla, 2014; Hindin, 2005; Kazemi et al., 2010; Martínez and Gracia, 2008; Martínez et al., 2007; Rodrigues et al., 2013; Turkel and Tezer, 2008; Villalobos et al., 2004; Wolfradt et al., 2003). Thus, the optimal parenting depends on the cultural backgrounds where parent-child relationships would generally develop (Becoña et al., 2012a; Berns, 2011; Chao, 1994; Espino, 2013; García and Gracia, 2009; Sigelman and Rider, 2012; White and Schnurr, 2012). In South American countries (Brazil) or Southern European countries (Spain) strictness, firm control, and impositions in the socialization practices, seem to be perceived in a negative way, and possibly more attention is placed on the use of warmth, emotional support of the child, and involvement in children' socialization (García and Gracia, 2014; Kazemi et al., 2010; Martínez and Gracia, 2008; Rudy and Grusec, 2001; Villalobos et al., 2004).

No conclusive evidence has been found on which parenting style is more protective against adolescent substance use in the European context. However some recently emergent research indicates that indulgent parenting has proven effective in diverse Southern European countries (i.e., Spain, Portugal and Italy) as well as in Germany (Di Maggio and Zappulla, 2014; García and Gracia, 2014; Rodrigues et al., 2013; Wolfradt et al., 2003); of them, only four Spanish studies measured adolescent substance use (García and Gracia, 2009, 2010; Gracia et al., 2012; Martínez et al., 2013).

This paper aims to examine what sort of parenting style (characterized by warmth and strictness) is more protective against adolescent substance use in different European countries. We could hypothesize, drawing from the literature review, that authoritative parenting style should be the most protective against adolescent

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