

# Gender differences between parenting styles and personality traits in patients of psychological outpatient clinics of general hospitals

Lili JIANG

Department of Clinical Psychology, Hunan Provincial People's Hospital (the first affiliate hospital of Hunan normal university), Changsha 410000, China

---

**Abstract:** To explore the gender differences in parenting style and personality characteristics of adolescents with emotional disorders, and to better understand the parenting needs of adolescents, data were collected from October 2022 to October 2024, including 159 adolescent patients' evaluations using the Egnä Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (EMBU) and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ). The results indicate that the neuroticism scores of females were significantly higher than those of males. The EMBU scale showed gender differences in factor F3 (over control), factor F4 (preference for subject), with adolescent males scoring higher than adolescent females on the evaluation results. There were gender differences in personality characteristics, parenting styles and needs of adolescent patients in general hospitals.

Key words: mood disorders; adolescents; parenting styles; personality traits

---

## 1 Introduction

In the process of socialization and development, men and women assume different responsibilities and roles in social life, and gradually develop and manifest gender differences. These differences are not only influenced by social and cultural factors, but are also related to gene expression [1]. Gender differences figure prominently in psychosomatic disorders. For example, cognitive studies of suicidal ideation have shown that cognitive strengths associated with suicidal ideation are more pronounced in post-pubertal males than females [2]. Currently, general hospital visitors tend to be of a younger age, and adolescents have a greater need to be seen for psychological problems. We have observed more female visitors, and men and women express their emotional perceptions differently. And we observed that parents of boys and girls have different expectations for children of different genders. This study specifically analyzes and compares the parenting styles of adolescent boys and girls and the differences in personality traits between them.

## 2 Research subjects and methods

### 2.1 Research subjects

Adolescents attending the outpatient clinic of the Department of Psychology of a general hospital in Hunan Province from October 2022 to October 2024 were selected for this study. Follow-up visits were queried in the psychological assessment system, and the demographic information of gender, age, and literacy level of the visiting adolescents, as well

as the results of the scale assessment, were collected. The inclusion criteria are: (1) Children are interviewed by a licensed physician with the title of attending physician or above in the Department of Psychology; (2) all children have completed the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire and Parenting Styles Questionnaire; and (3) aged  $\geq 7$  years and  $< 16$  years. Exclusion criteria: (1) missing results on any assessment; (2) persons with mental retardation; and (3) patients with schizophrenia. The sample included in this study had a mean age of  $(13.33 \pm 1.40)$  years, with 51 males and 108 females.

## 2.2 Research tools

(1) Eysenck personality questionnaire (EPQ) consists of four sub-scales: P-psychoticism, E-extroversion/introversion, N-neuroticism, and L-lie scale. A high score in P indicates personality traits such as aloofness and hostility, reflecting poor adaptability; a high N score indicates emotional instability, while a low N score represents emotional stability; a high E score suggests extroversion, while a low E score suggests introversion; the L score measures the degree of dissimulation of the subject. Each item on the scale is answered as "yes" or "no" by the subject based on their actual situation and score.

(2) Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (EMBU) questionnaire for parental rearing practices consists of 11 subscales: 6 factors for fathers (warmth and understanding, punishment and strictness, overprotection, preference, rejection, denial and overcontrol) and 5 factors for mothers (warmth and understanding, overprotection, rejection, denial, punishment and strictness, preference). Each item on the scale is rated on a 4-point scale: 1= never, 2=occasionally, 3=often, 4= always. Subjects evaluated their parents' consistent parenting styles through recollection.

## 2.3 Statistical methods

The statistical analysis was conducted using JASP 0.16 software for descriptive statistics and t-tests. The measurement data are expressed as  $(x \pm s)$ , with  $P < 0.05$  considered statistically significant.

## 3 Results

EPQ and EMBU total scores and factor scores of the subjects are shown in Table 1. The results of the comparison of between-group differences in gender showed that the neuroticism scores of females were significantly higher than those of males, and the difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The EMBU scale showed gender differences in factor F3 (overcontrol), factor F4 (preference for subject), and factor M5 (preference for subject), with adolescent males scoring higher than adolescent females on the evaluation results. Male adolescents rated the presence of stronger feelings of parental overcontrol and preference for subject.

Table 1. Adolescent personality traits and parenting styles (n=159)

Variants		Males (n=51)	Females (n=108)	Total (n=159)	t	p
	Age, years	13.22 $\pm$ 1.49	13.44 $\pm$ 1.31	13.33 $\pm$ 1.4	-0.79	0.44
	Psychoticism	5.6 $\pm$ 3.51	5.92 $\pm$ 3.82	5.76 $\pm$ 3.65	-0.44	0.67
	Extraversion/ Introversion	12.66 $\pm$ 5.36	11.16 $\pm$ 5.41	11.91 $\pm$ 5.41	1.39	0.17
	Neuroticism	14.84 $\pm$ 6.72	18.86 $\pm$ 4.74	16.85 $\pm$ 6.13	-3.46	<0.001
	Lie scale	9.38 $\pm$ 3.76	9.34 $\pm$ 4.02	9.36 $\pm$ 3.87	0.05	0.96
Father	F1 (Emotional warmth and understanding)	42.14 $\pm$ 11.1	40.14 $\pm$ 10.39	41.14 $\pm$ 10.75	1.93	0.36
	F2 (Punishment and strictness)	25.76 $\pm$ 9.09	23.16 $\pm$ 8.51	24.46 $\pm$ 8.86	1.48	0.14

	F3 (Overcontrol)	25.52±14.78	21.36±4.69	23.44±11.11	2.34	<0.05
	F4 (Preference for subject)	9.52±3.39	8.36±2.71	8.94±3.11	2.33	<0.05
	F5 (Rejection and denial)	13.34±4.22	11.98±4.37	12.66±4.33	0.58	0.12
	F6 (Overprotection)	12.24±3.34	11.68±3.15	11.96±3.24	0.86	0.39
Mother	M1 (Emotional warmth and understanding)	44.7±11.4	44.46±12.89	44.58±12.11	0.1	0.92
	M2 (Overcontrol and protection)	39.74±9.7	37.78±10.05	38.76±9.88	0.99	0.32
	M3 (Rejection and denial)	17.76±5.91	16.68±5.8	17.22±5.85	0.92	0.36
	M4 (Punishment and strictness)	16.92±6.19	16.04±5.87	16.48±6.02	0.73	0.47
	M5 (Preference for subject)	10.12±3.22	8.96±3.18	9.54±3.24	2.24	<0.05

#### 4 Discussion

The present study showed a gender difference in neuroticism scores among adolescent outpatient clinic attendees, and that this difference is roughly similar to gender stereotypes: females exhibit higher neuroticism scores. This is consistent with sociocultural individual development and the extent to which genetic gender differences vary by culture, with male and female behaviors attributed to roles in traditional culture [3]. The socialization theory of gender roles proposes that males and females, influenced by traditional Chinese culture, are assigned or expected to have different social roles, and that males are usually assigned or expected to have strong and independent personality qualities, while females are usually assigned or expected to have subtle and shy personality qualities [4]. Within this constraint of introversion, a neurotic personality trait gradually evolves. From the sample size we obtained, the number of girls attending the clinic was significantly higher than that of males. It indicates that girls have high level of neuroticism and exhibit more psychologically adverse conditions. On the other hand, it positively reflects that girls have higher emotional perception and psychological adjustment needs.

The present study showed that adolescent males reported higher feelings of parental favoritism and paternal over-interference, which is consistent with recent research in a population of college students and that males were significantly higher than females in scores of negative parenting styles (punishment, rejection, and overprotection) [5]. Negative parenting styles (punishment, rejection, and overprotection) scored significantly higher for males than for females. One of the reasons for this may be related to the cultural influences on family parenting styles, as Chinese society and culture mostly encourage men to be independent and to express their emotions less, thus using more negative parenting styles for them. There is less communication between parents and boys, which leads to parenting anxiety. It is also true that boys are more likely to engage in risky behaviors and hobbies, which can lead to overprotective parents. Parenting anxiety prompts parents to interfere in their children's lives in their own way and with their own authority. On the other hand, since it is a self-rating scale for raters to express subjective feelings, it can be assumed that boys feel that their fathers restrict their behavior more often than girls. It further reflects that adolescent males have more need for independence and autonomy

and they react more strongly to their parents' favoritism interference. It reveals that adolescent males more strongly aspire to a free and independent parenting style.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### **Reference**

- [1] Nathalie EH, Oksana B, Seda S, et al. 2023. Early social adversity, altered brain functional connectivity, and mental health. *Biol Psychiatry*, 93(5): 430-441. DOI: 10.1016/j.biopsych.2022.10.019.
- [2] Anderson SA, Rossetti MA. 2023. Sex-specific neurocognitive impairment. *Neurol Clin*, 41(2): 359-369, DOI:10.1016/j.ncl.2023.01.003
- [3] Costa PT, Terracciano A, McCrae RR. 2001. Gender differences in personality traits across cultures: robust and surprising findings. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 81(2): 322-331. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.81.2.322.
- [4] Jacklin CN, Reynolds C. 1993. Gender and childhood socialization. *The Psychology of Gender*. The Guilford Press, 197-214.
- [5] Zhang Y. 2023. Action mechanism of parenting styles and personalities on life satisfaction among college students and gender differences. Chengdu Medical College. DOI: 10.27843/d.cnki.gcdyy.2023.000238