Malay Adolescents' Perceptions of Maternal and Paternal Parenting Styles

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Abstract: *Malay adolescents' perceptions of parenting styles are assessed via Maternal and Paternal Parenting Style questionnaire. Subjects are Malay boys (n= 146) and girls (n= 284) in secondary schools. Both parents are perceived as being low in demandingness but high in responsiveness. Mothers are being rated lower in demandingness and higher in responsiveness compared to fathers. In terms of parenting style, both parents are perceived as being permissive. In addition, a high percentage of parents are reported as being uncertain in their parenting practices.* **

INTRODUCTION
The Malay Society
Occupation

The Malays in this study are traditionally a rural population. They live in a small town surrounded by agricultural land of mainly paddy fields and rubber estates. A small percentage of them work in government departments, higher institutions, schools, and private sector in and around the town. The rest of the Malays are engaged in agricultural activities such as paddy planting and rubber tapping. The town where the study is conducted is the largest in the district of Kubang Pasu.

Culture and Religion

The population in this district is predominantly Malays; who adhere to both Islamic law and the Malay customary law (adat). A Malay woman is taught a subservient role in relation to her husband, and that he has a right to make decisions on her behalf. Even though Malay husbands are presented as masters and decision makers as well as family providers, they do allow

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their wives freedom of action for economic activities (Firth, 1966). This could be attributed to the existence of two traditions side by side, both culturally as well as legally: Islamic and Malay traditions. Living within two different systems of reference for rights and duties might allow for some flexibility and manipulation of stricter rules.

One could refer to the Malay woman, on the one hand, as having been socialized to be shy, to keep to the domestic sphere, never to mix with men outside the close family, and always to be accompanied by her husband in public. Such rules are still acknowledged but not strictly adhered to in practice, mainly because of exposure to education and the opportunity to work. In addition, they also perform roles of importance, such as organizers of religious and family ceremonies, as there are Malay women organizations in the country (Djamour, 1959; Strannge, 1981).

Parenting

Malay parents' influences on children are mainly determined through heritage (genetically) and ecological process (Wan Abdul Halim Othman, 1993). This process occurs when parents observe the role models performed by their own parents and society at large. The behaviours set by these role models in turn influence child-rearing practices, which will subsequently have an effect on the child's development. This is clearly stated in a Malay saying "a new baby born is referred to as a clean white cloth" and it is the parents who will determine the colours in the child's life. This saying stresses the importance of parents' influence on child's development. On the other hand, in terms of genetic influence, the Malays believe there are certain genetic traits that will be difficult to change as portrayed in the Malay saying, "the mould determines the shape". Certain behaviours are embedded in the child through genetic hereditary these will be difficult to remove.

The parent-child relationship is determined by the parenting style practised by parents and society. The role models that exist within the society determine this practice and the belief on how human development process occurs. According to Wan Abdul Halim Othman (1993), Malay parents believe that all negative and anti-social behaviours in a child will eventually disappear as the child grows into adulthood. There is no need to either develop or correct these behaviours while the child is growing. The main responsibility of parents is mainly to shower the child with love and see to the child's safety. Among the beliefs which are said to determine the parenting style of the Malays are:

1.   All negative and anti-social behaviours in the child will eventually disappear when the child reaches adulthood. Therefore, there is no need for parents to correct these behaviours while the child is still young. Parents believe that their main role is to protect and shower the child with affection.

2.   If parents do not correct the negative and anti-social behaviours in the child at an early stage, these behaviours will be carried into adulthood. Therefore, parents believe they need to impose strict instructions and adhere to stringent monitoring of the child.

Studies on Malay families have also shown that, generally, Malay parents pamper their child. They believe that pampering is a trait that is inherited from their forefathers and thus, there is no need to change this practice. Djamour (1979) quoted an example of pampering practised among Malays, where a child between the ages of 4-5 is still allowed to wet the bed. When parents feel uneasy with such behaviour they will only seek to persuasion and light punishment as a means to end such an act. And if it still prevails, parents will accept such an act as fated. In addition, Laderman (1983) further observed this tolerance among the Malays as being due to the structure of the Malay house. In the Malay village, wooden houses are built on stilts. Thus, if the child wets the bed it can be cleaned as the wooden floor is easily washed and the water will seep through the floor onto the ground. As such, parents do not find difficulty in cleaning and this leads them to be more tolerant of such matters. Other behaviours that are prevalent among Malay parents in the village are:

1.   Parents allow the child to leave the house to play with little monitoring done.

2.   The child is carried by parents as long as parents are able to do so.

3.   Parents do not like to force the child into doing what the child dislikes, such as, refusing to go to school, eating or to taking medication or even going to bed early.

4.   Parents are helpless when the child cries.

5.   Parents will try to protect the child from facing problems as long as they are able to.

6.   Parents will not discuss a problem with the child and will also try to hide it.

7.　　The child is allowed to choose what to eat, when, and wherever the child pleases.

8.　　The child is not allowed to eat independently, fear of making a mess.

Role of Parents

Malay parents discipline the child in three ways:

1.　　The mother disciplines the child while the father displays a caring outlook.

2.　　The father disciplines the child while the mother displays a caring outlook.

3.　　Both parents discipline and care for the child.

It is difficult to identify the type of parenting style that is being practised by Malay parents as no in-depth study has been done. However, according to Djamour, type (1) that is, mothers tend to stress on discipline compared to fathers, is more prevalent among Malays. Roff (1974) further supports Djamour when he claims that Malay mothers have the tendency to monitor and punish the child, while fathers will resort to corporal punishment when the misconduct is serious. Again this hardly happens. On the other hand, Abdul Maulud (1976) describes Malay mothers as permissive, always giving in to the demands of the child. When mothers are unable to control the demands, they will then turn to fathers, as described by type (2).

In the study by Abdul Maulud, he finds there is a difference in child rearing towards sons and daughters. Sons are often punished using the hand or some other devices but daughters are unlikely to receive such punishment. Daughters tend to be scolded and nagged by mothers. Mothers too are found to protect the child when the child receives too much punishment from fathers.

In terms of monitoring, adolescents are constantly being monitored. They are only allowed to leave the house to attend school and to work (Wan Abdul Halim Othman, 1993). However, this practice has since changed. In a more recent study (Zahyah Hanafi, 2003), it is found that Malay parents tend to practise little monitoring on the child. More freedom is given to the child in terms of leaving the house and doing what she/he likes. Parents are reported not to question the child on the type of activity the child does outside the home. In terms of gender differences, the study found that boys have more freedom compared to girls.

Problem Statement

The literature on parenting studies is numerous but the results have not been definite. Some studies have shown paternal and maternal parenting styles to differ (Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Paulson & Sputa, 1996) while others report it to be similar (Baumrind, 1991; Smetana, 1995). Therefore, the question of whether there is a difference among paternal and maternal parenting characteristic has yet to be conclusively answered.

Similarly, most studies have either been conducted on Anglo-European (Bogenschneider & Small, 1997; Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992) or Chinese families (Shek, 1995, 1998). Thus, little is known about parenting practices among other Asian groups.

In terms of parent-adolescent relationship, studies have also shown it to be inconclusive. Youniss and Smollar (1985) report fathers to be less positive than mothers, while Lempers and Clark-Lempers (1992) find differences at certain stages of adolescence.

In addition, research findings have suggested there are cross-cultural differences in parenting practices (Best & House, 1994). For example, values and parenting styles that work best for Anglo-European families may not work for other ethnic groups. Thus, cultural context is seen as an important component in parenting research because in most cultures, values and ideas are transmitted during the child rearing practices and consequently pass on to the next generation. As such, parenting practices are valuable in depicting patterns of parenting styles that vary across cultures.

In Western European context (e.g., middle-class Anglo-European) authoritative parenting is reported to be the most effective form of transmitting values. Generally, Western European cultures adhere to individualistic values such as the need for individual freedom and autonomy, self reliance, determination to achieve goals based on personal needs (Goregenli, 1997), equality and freedom (Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). Individuals are allowed to think for themselves and persevere their ambitions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, authoritativeness is not only the most effective form of transmitting values but it is also the most effective parenting style among Western families (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). According to Trandis (1985), this individualistic construct is seen as "the single most important dimension of cultural difference in social behavior" that differentiates the Western from the Eastern cultural groups.

In the Eastern context, especially among the Chinese, authoritarian parenting style is the more favoured style (McBride-Chang & Chang, 1998; Shek, 2000). This is in line with Chinese culture where the child is required

to obey parents' requirement of strict obedience. This is perceived by Chinese parents as caring and in the spirit of "training" or "guan" which revolves around a controlling style with a high degree of parent-child interaction and physical proximity.

In terms of assessing parenting style according to adolescents' gender, Lytton and Romney (1991) suggest that parents do not consistently treat daughters more warmly than they treat sons. However, Block (1983) reports parents in Western countries tend to be more controlling and punitive towards sons than daughters.

On the other hand, both Chinese parents are perceived as more demanding by daughters compared to sons. This could be attributed to Chinese traditions of parents being responsible in ensuring the chastity of their daughters. However, some studies report no gender differences in either sons' or daughters' perceptions of their parents' parenting style (Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Smetana, 1995).

Thus, the question whether there is any difference in child rearing between Western and Eastern parents, and difference in parents' treatment towards sons and daughters have yet to be definite. The samples studied in the literature do not include other ethnic groups but seemed to focus mainly on White and Chinese parents. Therefore, there is a need to examine other ethnic groups to see whether the findings are similar to those in the literature.

Research Questions

The inconsistencies that exist in the literature have initiated this study. Thus, the research questions in this research are:

1. Is there any difference in mothers' and fathers' level of parenting?
2. Do mothers and fathers differ in their level of parenting towards sons and daughters?

Significance of the Study

The findings will contribute to a further understanding of Malay parent-adolescent relationship. It will:

1. be a guide for school administrators, teachers, parents, and counsellors when developing parenting programs for Malay parents,
2. add to the current literature on parenting among Malay parents, and

3.   expand knowledge on interpersonal communication between parents and adolescents.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations in carrying out this study. The schools chosen are only in one district in Kedah. The sample consists of only Malay boys and girls aged between 16 and 17, living with both biological parents. Therefore, the findings in this study cannot be generalised to all Malay parents.

Typology of Parenting Style

Most of the early studies pertaining to discussions on parenting influences on child's development is based on Baumrind's typology: authoritative-authoritarian-permissive (Baumrind, 1967). In spite of its well-accepted configuration approach, Baumrind has limited her scope of study to include only well-functioning families, from which her typology is constructed. This limitation has initiated Maccoby and Martin (1983) to transform Baumrind's typology of generalisability into a more linear construct where theoretically important aspects of parenting could be measured. Both Baumrind, Maccoby and Martin redefined parenting style into two specific underlying processes that could best be understood within a social learning or ethnological perspective.

Parenting style is thus defined with two specific underlying processes: (1) the frequency and type of demand initiated by parents, and (2) the possibility of parental reinforcement. As a result, Baumrind, Maccoby and Martin propose two dimensions with these processes embedded in the parenting style: demandingness (control) and responsiveness (warmth). Demandingness will act as a socializing agent, while responsiveness will reflect parents' recognition of the child's autonomy.

Baumrind (1991) defines authoritative style as high in both demandingness and responsiveness. Authoritarian, on the other hand, is high in demandingness but low in responsiveness. While, permissiveness is low in demandingess but high in responsiveness. Maccoby and Martin further distinguish two more patterns of parenting: indulgent and neglect. Indulgent is similar to permissive, that is, low in demandingness and high in responsiveness. Neglect refers to low in both demandingness and responsiveness. With the existence of the neglect dimension, Maccoby and Martin have widened the inclusion of other possibilities of parenting.

Each of the dimensions has different parenting practices. According to Baumrind (1991), an authoritative parent may be defined, as claims

parents make on the child to become integrated into the family whole by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront those who disobey" (p.748). These behaviours by parents are said to act as a socializing agent in the child's life. While responsiveness is define as "actions which intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive and acquiescent to the child's special needs and demands" (p.748). These actions on the other hand, are regarded as parents' way of showing their recognition of the child's individuality.

According to Baumrind, an authoritative (high demandingness and high responsiveness) parent "directs the child's activities ... in a rational, issue-oriented manner ... [and] encourages verbal give and take," (Baumrind, 1968, p. 261). In other words, parents practise democracy in raising the child. For example, parents may predetermine rules but these rules are subjected to changes based on the child's views, opinions, and circumstances and also on parents' explanation, reasoning, and meanings of the rules they set (Baumrind, 1970).

Parents who practise authoritative parenting allow the child to be independent and encourage individuality, invite the child to be involved in family decision and set standards for the child (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). For example, the child is encouraged to propose ways and to reason on disciplinary problems, and at the same time learn to respect adult authorities and think independently (Baumrind, 1996). In other words, parents create a home environment where the child feels she/he is worthy of trust. The child is allowed to make independent decisions and do not have to succumb to decisions and rules imposed by parents.

In addition, parents who are authoritative tend to be warm, self-efficacious in their parenting, are less emotional towards the child misdeeds and place more interest in long-term goals (Kochanska, Kuczynski & Radke-Yarrow, 1989). These parents tend to use indirect and persuasive verbal strategies such as suggestions and explanations and to provide support, encouragement, and positive reinforcement (Dekovic & Janssens, 1992). Baumrind (1991) term this style as authoritative.

The second category of parenting style is authoritarian. According to Baumrind (1968),

... an authoritarian parent attempts to shape, control, and evaluate the behaviour and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct ... she values obedience as a virtue and favours punitive, forceful measures to curb self-will at points where the child's actions or beliefs conflict with what she thinks is right conduct (p. 261).

Authoritarian parents (high demandingness and low responsiveness) is referred to as parents who tend to be firm in setting rules that are enforced onto the child with no room for discussion, expecting the child to obey without questioning or reflecting these rules. These parents place high emphasis on discipline; usually through harshness and also display low parental support. A child raised by parents who are authoritarian are usually discontent, withdrawn (Baumrind, 1970, 1971), anxious or depressed, with incompetent social skills (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). On the other hand, parents who practise authoritarian parenting but do not enforce rules onto the child, tend to develop a child who is aggressive and lacking in self-control, resulting in peer rejection and delinquency in life (Patterson, DeBarsyshe, & Ramsey, 1989). As a result, authoritarian parenting style is believed to hinder cognitive development by discouraging the child from involving in active exploration and problem solving. This may result in the child being highly dependent on adult control and guidance.

Third, a permissive/indulgent (low demandingness and high responsiveness) parent "allows the child to regulate his/her own activities as much as possible ... and does not encourage him/her to obey externally-defined standards" (Baumrind, 1968, p. 261). In this parenting environment parents tend to create a laissez-faire parenting style where rules and expectations they set tend to be less conforming, less inclined to punishment, reflecting as though the child has control over the parents. Permissive style is believed to encourage disciplinary problem, as a child brought up in this type of environment is less inclined to rules and regulations (Baumrind, 1971). Permissive parenting may also contribute to poor performance in school, higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression (Darling, 1999).

Finally, neglect/uninvolved parents are low in both demandingness and responsiveness. Parents who adhere to this type of parenting show no concern to either the child's needs or the child's behaviour and are disen-

gaged from parenting. These parents allow the child to engage in unsupervised behaviour with no concern for the child's welfare. Studies have shown parents who neglect and fail to monitor their child's behaviour tend to produce a child with problems relating to truancy, alcoholism, and delinquency in adolescence and adulthood (Lamborn et al., 1991).

Baumrind (1984) believes that among the four parenting styles, the ideal one will be where parents exert a high degree of control and at the same time allow the child to strive for autonomy in areas that seem benefiting to the child. This conducive environment is termed authoritative, where the child develops self-reliance, self-control, inquisitiveness and posses high esteem.

METHODOLOGY
Subjects
Three secondary schools in the Kubang Pasu District are selected for this study. The subjects are Form 5 students from each of the school. A total of 146 Malay boys and 284 Malay girls (N= 430) are involved. Each of the school represents the three levels of academic achievement: high, average, and low in the Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia Trial examination, 2002.

Instrument
The instrument "Parenting Style Scale" by Paulson (1994) is derived from an extensive review of the literature with the definitions of the two dimensions as discussed by Maccoby and Martin (1983). There are five items pertaining to mother's and father's demandingness and responsiveness. Demandingness items are constructed to elicit information on rules and discipline strategies, while responsiveness items pertain to warmth and nurturance practices. Students respond to the parenting items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. This 5-point Likert scale is adapted for easy comprehension by students. The original questionnaire has the following anchors: 1 = very unlike, 2 = more unlike than like, 3 = neither like nor unlike, 4 = more like than unlike, 5 = very like. In addition, the 5-point Likert scale items for demandingness are recoded to cater for the negative implications in the items. To determine the level of demandingness and responsiveness the mode technique is applied. The levels of demandingness and responsiveness are categorised into: 1 = low, 3 = undecided, 5 = high.

Research Procedures

Prior approval for conducting the final survey in the schools is obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) of the Education Ministry. Permission is further requested from the Kedah State Education Department and respective principals of the schools where the surveys are conducted.

An accompanying letter is attached to the questionnaire to explain briefly the purpose of the study. The questionnaire is prepared on two separate booklets, one pertaining to mother and the other to father. The questionnaire is accompanied by a general purpose of the study and requests the respondents' cooperation and participation. The respondents are informed that the research project is academic in nature and that the questionnaire is not being conducted at the request of the Kedah State Department of Education. It is merely to collect data pertaining to respondents' perception of their parents' parenting style.

The survey is conducted twice in each of the three schools The first survey is conducted on the first visit, with items pertaining to mother. The second survey, is conducted on the following day with items pertaining to father. This is to ensure respondents are not confused when having to respond to both mother and father items in the questionnaire.

The researcher administered the survey at the respective schools to reduce non-responding error. To ensure that reading level do not impede students' ability to reliably complete the measures, the instructions and individual items for each instrument are read aloud by the researcher while students read along silently.

Techniques of Data Analysis

After the data have been collected and entered into the SPSS for Windows Release 11.0, it is analysed to fulfil the research questions in the study. The measurement scales used in the study are mainly ordinal scales. The statistical procedure used is inferential statistics. To answer the first research question: do mothers and fathers differ in their level of parenting style, a descriptive analysis of frequencies and percentages on respondents' gender and parents' educational level are carried out. Similarly, mothers' and fathers' demandingness and responsiveness are also tabulated. The frequency and percentages of the analyses are presented in the form of tables. Next, Chi-square test for relatedness is conducted to examine whether there are significant differences between variables of two levels. The analysis is first conducted on the three schools, then, followed by individual school. Due to

the nature of the study, where the researcher has confined the study to a stratified sampling; three levels of school achievement (high, average & low), a categorical scale is used instead of a continuous (Cohen et al., 2001, p. 318). Thus, the mode value (tri-modal) determines a distribution that occurs most frequently. This is done by inspection rather than by computation.

The categorical nature of the data (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998) is best analysed using non-parametric tests, where assumptions are made on the chosen sample and not on the wider population (Cohen et al. 2001, p. 318). In addition, non-parametric tests have the advantage of being tailored to particular individual circumstances, in this case, three different levels of academic achievement (Cohen et al. 2001, p. 318).

To answer the second research question: do mothers and fathers differ in their parenting style towards sons and daughters, Mann-Whitney U test is conducted.

RESULTS

Research question 1: Is there any difference in mothers' and fathers' level of parenting?

Demandingness

Parents' level of demandingness is reported in Table 1. Overall, parents are perceived to have low demandingness (65.5%). There is no significant difference between mothers and fathers demanding behaviours in these schools ($p > .05$, $p = .219$). About 22.9% of adolescents are undecided on their parents' demanding behaviours, more prominent for fathers (25.3%) than mothers (20.5%).

In each of the schools, demandingness is perceived to be low (Table 2). However, it is only in the high-achieving school that there is significant difference between mothers' and fathers' demandingness ($p < .05$, $p = .039$), with mothers (65%) being rated lower in demandingness compared to fathers (61.7%).

There is however, no significant difference between mothers' and fathers' demandingness in the average ($p > .05$, $p = .081$) and low-achieving schools ($p > .05$, $p = .660$).

A group of adolescents are unable to identify their parents' demanding behaviours in each of the schools, with more in the low-achieving school compared to the other two schools.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Demandingness

Gender	High	Low	Undecided	p	Total
Mothers	50	292	88	.219	430
	(11.6)	(67.9)	(20.5)		
Fathers	50	271	109	-	430
	(11.6)	(63)	(25.3)		
Parents	100	563	197	-	860
(N= 860)	(11.6)	(65.5)	(22.9)		

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

Responsiveness

A high percentage of parents (66.2%) are perceived to be highly responsive towards their adolescents (Table 3). There is significant difference between mothers' and fathers' responsiveness (c2 = 104.243, d.f. = 4, p = .001). Mothers (70.6%) are rated higher in responsive behaviours compared to fathers (61.6%).

Overall about 28% of adolescents could not identify whether their parents have any responsive behaviours. There are more adolescents who could not detect demandingness in their fathers (31.4%) compared to mothers (24.7%).

Responsive behaviours by parents are reported to be high in each of the schools (Table 4). Differences between mothers' and fathers' responsiveness are found in the high (c2 = 60. 233, d.f. = 4, p = .001), average (c2 = 33.028, d.f. = 4, p = .001), and low-achieving (c2 = 17.102, df = 4, p = .002) schools.

There are more adolescents in each of the schools that could not identify their fathers' responsive practises compared to mothers'.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Demandingness According to Schools

Gender	Gender	High	Low	Undecided	Total
High-achieving	Mothers	30 (17.1)	114 (65.1)	31 (17.7)	175
	Fathers	27 (15.4)	108 (61.7)	40 (22.9)	175
Parents		57 (16.3)	222 (63.4)	71 (20.3)	350
Average-achieving	Mothers	8 (5.7)	104 (73.8)	29 (20.6)	141
	Fathers	12 (8.5)	94 (66.7)	35 (24.8)	141
Parents		20 (7.1)	198 (70.2)	64 (22.7)	282 -
Low-achieving	Mothers	12 (10.5)	28 (24.6)	28 (24.6)	114
	Fathers	11 (9.6)	69 (60.5)	34 (29.8)	114
Parents		23 (10.1)	143 (62.7)	62 (27.2)	228

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

Parenting Style

Table 5 reports majority of parents (47%) are perceived by adolescents as being permissive. A small percentage of parents are categorised as authoritative (7.4%), neglect (3.3%), and authoritarian (1.5%). On the other hand, a high percentage of adolescents (40.8%) are unable to place their parents in any of the four dimensions of parenting style.

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Table 3

Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Responsiveness

Gender	High	Low	Undecided	Total
Mothers	304	20	106	430
	(70.6)	(4.7)	(24.7)	
Fathers	265	30	135	430
	(61.6)	(7)	(31.4)	
Parents	569	50	241	860
	(66.2)	(5.8)	(28)	

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

There are more parents practising a permissive parenting style compared to other styles (Table 6). A high percentage of adolescents in each of the school are unable to identify the type of parenting style their parents practise.

Demandingness
Table 7 reports significant differences between parents' level of demandingness towards sons and daughters (p <.000), with higher demandingness towards daughters (69.6%) compared to sons (58%). Similarly, in the low-achieving school, there is significant difference between mothers' and fathers' demanding behaviours (p <.05), with both parents being more demanding towards sons than daughters. No significant difference exists between mothers' and fathers' demanding behaviours towards sons and daughters in the high and average-achieving schools (p >.05).

Responsiveness
No significant difference exists between mothers and fathers responsive behaviours towards sons and daughters in all three schools (Table 8).

Research question 2: Do mothers and fathers differ in their level of parenting towards sons and daughters?

Table 4

Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Responsiveness According to Schools

Gender	Gender	High	Low	Undecided	Total
High achieving	Mothers	123 (70.3)	7 (4)	45 (25.7)	175
	Fathers	102 (58.3)	14 (8)	59 (33.7)	175
	Parent	225 (64.3)	21 (6)	104 (29.7)	350
Average achieving	Mothers	97 (68.8)	7 (5)	37 (26.2)	141
	Fathers	95 (67.4)	8 (5.7)	38 (27)	141
	Parents	192 (68.1)	15 (5.3)	75 (26.6)	282
Low achieving	Mothers	84 (73.7)	6 (5.3)	24 (21.1)	114
	Fathers	68 (59.6)	8 (7)	38 (33.3)	114
	Parents	152 (66.7)	14 (6.1)	62 (27.2)	224

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the relationships between paternal and maternal parenting style among Malay adolescents. With reference to the limitations of the existing study, the following elements are formulated into the research design.

Table 5

Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Parenting Style

Gender	Ave.	Aan.	Per.	Neg.	Un.	Total
Mothers	36	6	220	9	159	430
	(8.4)	(1.4)	(51.2)	(2.1)	(37)	
Fathers	28	7	184	19	192	430
	(6.5)	(1.6)	(42.8)	(4.4)	(44.7)	
Parents	64	13	404	28	35	8860
	(7.4)	(1.5)	(47)	(3.3)	(40.8)	

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

Ave. – Authoritative   Neg. – Neglect

Aan. – Authoritarian   Un. - Undecided   Per. – Permissive

First, descriptive measures of parental qualities are used to assess global parenting style. Second, non-parametric tests are applied to examine whether there are any difference in paternal and maternal parenting style towards sons and daughters. Third, because few researchers have examined these issues in non-Western contexts, Malay participants are chosen as respondents in the study.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine adolescents' perceptions of their parents' involvement at home in terms of demanding and responsive practises.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Do mothers and fathers differ in their level of parenting style?
2. Do mothers and fathers differ in their level of parenting towards sons and daughters?

Discussion of the Findings

The study on Malay adolescents in secondary schools in the district of Kubang Pasu offers new information on adolescents' perceptions of parents in terms of parenting style.

Table 6

Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Parenting Styles According to Schools

Gender.	Ave.	Aan.	Per.	Neg.	Un.	Total
High-achieving						
Mothers	21	3	88	1	62	175
	(12)	(1.7)	(50.3)	(0.6)	(35.4)	
Fathers	15	4	69	7	80	175
	(8.6)	(2.3)	(39.4)	(4)	(45.7)	
Parents	36	7	157	8	142	350
	(10.3)	(2)	(44.9)	(2.3)	(40.6)	
Average-achieving						
Mothers	6	-	73	6	56	141
	(4.3)	-	(51.8)	(4.3)	(39.7)	
Fathers	6	1	68	6	60	141
	(4.3)	(0.7)	(48.2)	(4.3)	(42.6)	
Parents	12	1	141	12	116	282
	(4.3)	(0.4)	(50)	(4.3)	(41.1)	
Low-achieving						
Mothers	9	3	59	2	41	114
	(7.9)	(2.6)	(51.8)	(1.8)	(36)	
Fathers	7	2	47	6	52	114
	(6.1)	(1.8)	(41.2)	(5.3)	(45.6)	
Parents	16	5	106	8	93	228
	(7)	(2.2)	(46.5)	(3.5)	(40.8)	

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

Ave – Authoritative   Aan – Authoritarian

Un. – Undecided   Per - Permissive   Neg – Neglect

Table 7

Mothers' and Fathers' Demandingness Towards Sons and Daughters According to Schools

	Gender	Adolescents	*p* value (Two-tailed)	Total
High achieving	Mothers	Boys Girls	.455	175
	Fathers	Boys Girls	.580	175
Average achieving	Mother	Boys Girls	.924	282
	Father	Boys Girls	.713	282
Low achieving	Mother	Boys Girls	.004**	228
	Father	Boys Girls	.002**	228
Parents		Boys Girls	001**	860

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages
** $p < .05$.

The study provides substantial evidence to support studies indicating that parenting style differs in terms of culture and setting. However, it is important to be cautious in interpreting these results and not overstate the cause-effect relation due to the non-experimental nature of the data and design. First, the choice of dimensions of parenting style is not exhaustive. Other dimensions of parenting style (specific parenting style) are not included in this study. Cultural differences may cause different dimensions to have different effects. Second, differences in the conceptualisation and operational definitions of constructs will no doubt produce different results. Caution should also be used when comparing findings reported here with those of other studies. Third, traditionally, survey items on parenting studies normally have continuous Likert-scale with four anchors on

Table 8

Mothers and Fathers Responsiveness Towards Sons and Daughters According to Schools

Parents	Adolescents	*p* value (Two-tailed)	Total
High-achieving			
Mothers	Boys Girls	.531	175
Fathers	Boys Girls	.895	175
Average-achieving			
Mothers	Boys Girls	.941	141
Fathers	Boys Girls	.341	141
Low-achieving			
Mothers	Boys Girls	.131	114
continue			
Fathers	Boys Girls	.298	114
continue			
Parents	Boys Girls	.104	860

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

its items and uses parametric tests. However, in this study the researcher has categorical Likert-scale with five anchors and uses nonparametric techniques. This may produce a different effect on the analysis of the data. Finally, because only families in one district in Kedah are recruited, generalisability of the findings to other cultural contexts remains to be demonstrated.

Despite the limitations, this research is important both theoretically and practically. It contributes to a better understanding of parenting style and its dimensions, and interrelationships among them. Thus, this section will discuss the major findings that have emerged from this study.

Demandingness

Overall, Malay parents are generally low in their demandingness towards adolescents. This finding contradicts most reports on non-Western parenting practices. For example, Asians, especially Chinese, irrespective of where they live, generally place high demanding attitude towards raising children. Similarly, African-Americans and Anglo-Canadians too are inclined towards this high demanding practice.

The difference in the way Malay parents handle the adolescent could be due to the way they perceive parenting. Malay parents tend to fall back on the way they were raised by their own parents and how society perceive parenting practices. The Malays believe that most negative and anti-social behaviours of a child will eventually disappear when the child reaches adulthood. Therefore, there is no need to impose strict rules in the child's lives. All parents need to do is to attend to the needs of the child, protect, and be affectionate (Wan Abdul Halim Othman, 1993). High level of tolerance (Djamour, 1979: Laderman, 1983) and low demandingness (Abdul Maulud, 1976) towards the child are observed to be the common practice among Malay parents. Even though these findings are cited in the 70s and 80s, it reflects the consistency of such practices in the present study. Such consistency in parenting style is also cited among other ethnic parents. For example, the Chinese parents have inherited their authoritarian style from their forefathers, so are most Western authoritative parents. These similar intergenerational patterns of parenting practices are cited in all major studies on parenting. Because there is a scarcity of research on the changing pattern of the parent-adolescent relationship in a Malay culture, the present finding may be an important contribution to the literature.

It is also possible that Malay parents tend to practise low demandingness at this stage of the adolescent's life because they are in the last year of schooling (17 years old). Parents may think that they should impose less demand on the adolescent. This finding is in line with those of Paulson and Sputa (1996). Such a move is thought to be appropriate due to the increasing levels of autonomy characteristic of transformations during adolescence (Hill, 1995).

In terms of differences in gender treatment, overall, Malay parents tend to impose a higher form of demandingness on daughters compared to

sons. Malay parents are thus found to have similar controlling practices as those of the Chinese (Shek, 2000). This treatment however, differs from those of Western parents who tend to be more controlling towards sons compared to daughters (Block, 1983). The differences between the way parents control their sons and daughters could be related to differences in culture. The Malays may have similar belief as the Chinese, that is, it is the parents' responsibility to ensure the chastity of daughters and that it will be appropriate for daughters to be less outgoing. This will reflect a proper upbringing.

Responsiveness

Malay parents in this study are found to practice high responsiveness towards both sons and daughters. They believe that part of their responsibility is to shower the child with affection and thus they are inclined to pamper the child since young. This is especially true for mothers. Mothers irrespective of ethnic group and culture are found to be more responsive compared to fathers. This may be due to their nature.

Permissiveness

The low demanding and high responsive practices among Malay parents in this study have resulted in a majority of them being permissive in nature. Previous studies have shown that permissive parents view rules regarding personal issues as less obligatory (Smetana, 1995). The frequency distribution of items on demandingness has clearly indicated the low monitoring skills of Malay parents. Thus, the presence of love and the absence of restrictions are characteristics of permissive style (Lau et al., 1990; Parish & McCluskery, 1992).

The findings in this study support Baumrind's (1968) classification of parenting patterns. According to Baumrind, low demanding and high responsiveness tend to produce a permissive style. As reported, the parents in this study allow the adolescents to lead an unsupervised life. No doubt parents are reported to set rules but again these rules are not strictly implemented. Adolescents who disobey these rules or do something wrong are not punished for their actions. This action is in line with what is stated by Baumrind (1986, p.261) concerning permissive parents: "... allows the child to regulate his/her own activities as much as possible ... and does not encourage him/her to obey externally-defined standards". A child brought up in this type of environment tends to be less conforming to rules and regulations. What will happen when the adolescent goes to school where there are

rules and regulations set to discipline students? Darling (1999) adds that the adolescent raised by permissive style is inclined towards a poor school performance. Although this study does not relate parenting style with academic achievement but previous studies have shown permissive style is related to problem behaviours in a child, such as adolescent identity (Bosma & Gerrits, 1985), suicide (McKenry, Tishier, & Kelley, 1982), psychopathology (Prange, Greenbaum, Silver, & Friedman, 1992), and proneness to delinquency (Tolan & Lorion, 1988). There are also reports on poor family functioning being related to elevated levels of substance abuse (McKay, Murphy, Rivinus, & Maisto, 1991) and smoking (Doherty & Allen, 1994). The findings in these studies are rather worrying if it is true that poor parenting skills may result in problematic behaviours in adolescent.

Undecided

The undecided group appears to describe a type of parenting not previously described. One possible reason for this omission is that parenting studies tend to treat the "undecided" anchor as being interval instead of ordinal. As such, a large number of essentially "undecided" adolescents may have been overlooked. The large number of "undecided" could be possible as the sample in this study comprised adolescents from rural areas. They may be unaware of what parenting practices really mean. Therefore, they might find difficulty in trying to understand the concept of parenting. As such, they may be "undecided" whether the behaviour exists or not in their parents.

The existence of the "undecided" category will also reflect parents' poor parenting skill. As mentioned in the literature, for parenting practices to have an effect these practices must be communicated effectively and consistently. Parents must ensure an effective follow through so that consistent monitoring will ensure the child is focused on the desired outcome. Therefore to exclude this anchor in the Likert-scale will mean disregarding the existence of adolescents who are unsure. In addition, excluding it will also mean that the researcher assumes parents will either fall under low or high parenting skill. The "undecided" category may reflect a new dimension of parenting that needs further investigation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government on its part has shown awareness on the importance of parents' role in the child's life when the Ministry of Family and Women Development launched a campaign to instil quality relationship within family

members. The objective of this campaign is to create a harmonious and loving family with the hope that creating such a home environment will indirectly curb rampant education and social problems of today. However little is done at the school level to disseminate this idea.

Based on the findings and discussion in this study, the following recommendations are formulated for the various educational divisions to play a more aggressive role in the education of children.

For Schools

The first step is to initiate parental programs in school. The school needs to plan and implement the program so as to bridge the gap between school and home. However, this program needs to be planned and implemented effectively to ensure maximum results will be attained. It will be best to invite certain parties to help in the running of the program (Epstein, 1995). For example, the first step will be to invite a researcher in to conduct a study to identify the parents that will be participating in the program. The result of this study will give a clearer picture on the different levels of parenting among parents. It is from here that programs could be built to cater for the different levels of parenting. Programs should not be done on a general assumption of parents' involvement, as the results of this study and others (Seginer, 1983) have indicated that parents have different levels of parenting skills. For example, parents who are low in monitoring need to be told that they need to constantly be more aware of the danger of allowing too much freedom when the child move into secondary school. Parents need to be taught when, what, and how to instil effective monitoring practices in the adolescent. Similarly, parents who are low in their warmth towards adolescent need to be taught the importance of a closer parent-adolescent relationship. Parents have to be taught specific skills in nurturing the warmth atmosphere in the home. What most parenting programs do is to assume that parents are of similar involvement level, assuming that the level is low. Thus, such programs may not benefit certain parents and eventually, will fail to achieve its objectives. In addition, constant evaluation should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the program.

The recommended sample for a school-family study should be Form One students. The reasons being, first, these students are in their first year of secondary school. They are at the verge of entering early adolescence. For these students it is a transition period and they will need a lot of guidance and help in adapting to the new life style and school environment. Second, parents too need to change their approach to child rearing as chil-

dren move into secondary school. Certain skills need to be emphasised while others may need lesser attention. It will also be the right time to get parents to be more involved in the child's life as parents will generally feel that once the child steps into secondary school, there is less need to be involved (Epstein, 1987). Third, researchers believe that in order for parenting skills to have an effect it has to be consistently instilled throughout the schooling years (Trusty, 2000). This will mean starting from the first year of secondary school. Once parents are properly guided and taught the basic skill of parental involvement it will be assumed that as the child proceeds in age the parenting practices will have made an impact on the child's life. Thus, schools need to play an aggressive role in ensuring parents are monitored and that they meet the expectations of the program.

School-family programs to improve parent-child relationship in the home have shown outstanding record of success in promoting achievement – known as "the alterable curriculum of the home." It is twice as predictive of academic learning as is family socio-economic status (Walberg, 1984). Parenting programs will benefit not only adolescents and school but also parents. The ability to be able to engage in one's child at home will boost parents' sense of efficacy (Hoover-Demsey et al., 1992). It is important that parents feel they could contribute to the child's development, as this will motivate them to be more involved.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the stratified sample used in the present study, all results must be seen as tentative rather than definitive and as providing guidelines for future research rather than clear answers to the questions posed. First, the study needs to be replicated across a broader range of socio-economic status (SES). Each level of SES should be represented with a larger sample. This might generate different results. In addition, the samples should also include other ethnic groups, as this will provide some answers to the differences in parenting practices.

In terms of instrument, the data in this study is analysed using non-parametric tests, as the scales are categorical in nature. It will be interesting to see what the results will be when parametric tests using continuous scales are applied.

The researcher also proposes that future studies look into parents' perceptions of their own parenting practices and compare these with those perceived by their children. This will provide answers to the gap that exists between parents' and children's perceptions of parenting style. No doubt

there are studies that have looked into this aspect (Paulson, 1994; Paulson & Sputa, 1996; Shek, 1999) but it is still on a small scale to be generalised. In addition, these studies cover samples in European and Chinese contexts. There are few studies that examine these aspects using samples from other ethnic groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings in this study illustrate the complex mechanisms through which the contexts the adolescent live influences her/his development. The study begins by looking at the different processes occurring in one context: the parent-adolescent relationship. In general, parents have low level of demandingness but high level of responsiveness. The researcher does not believe that this study has explained the phenomenon of parenting practice differences in any final sense. What the researcher believes is that the ecological approach, with its focus on the multiple contexts in which adolescents live, offers promise as a foundation for future research on this important social issue. Any explanation of the phenomenon of ethnic differences must take into account multiple, interactive processes of influence that operate across multiple interrelated contexts.

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