



Exploring The Relationship Between Authoritarian Parenting Style and Antisocial Behaviour Among Malaysian University Students Across Genders

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ABSTRACT: The increasing rate of antisocial behaviour has become a global concern, with authoritarian parenting identified as one of the contributing factors. This study aimed to examine the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour, particularly physical aggression, social aggression, and rule-breaking among Malaysian university students across genders. This cross-sectional study recruited 174 Malaysian university students aged 18 to 25. The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) was used to assess authoritarian parenting style, while the Subtypes of Antisocial Behaviour Questionnaire (STAB) measured physical aggression, social aggression, and rule-breaking tendencies. The findings showed that authoritarian parenting was strongly linked to antisocial behaviour, including physical aggression, social aggression, and rule breaking. No significant gender differences were found in antisocial behaviour. These findings align with previous research demonstrating the correlation between authoritarian parenting and antisocial tendencies. The only difference lies in the strength of the associations. Future research should explore underlying mechanisms such as emotional regulation, peer influence and cultural influences in shaping antisocial behaviour.

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KEYWORDS:

authoritarian parenting, antisocial behaviour, aggression, Malaysian university students

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INTRODUCTION

Antisocial behaviour is defined as any delinquent actions that deviate from societal norms and behaviours that violate the fundamental rights of others and (Gaik et al., 2010). According to Idris (2020), antisocial behaviour is generally linked to poor empathy, rebellion, aggression, risk-taking, and irresponsible behaviour, regardless of age and gender. Antisocial behaviour can be classified into three subtypes: physical aggression, social aggression, and rule breaking. Physical aggression refers to behaviour that causes physical injury to others (Kaye & Erdley, 2011) such as striking, kicking, biting, stabbing using weapons, and more (Yanuari et al., 2022). Jaggi and Faisal (2023) reported that even though men display more physical aggression than women among undergraduate students in India, women exhibit higher degrees of hostility and verbal aggression. Social aggression is a type of antisocial behaviour that uses social manipulations such as ostracism, gossiping, and spreading rumours to damage people's reputations and relationships (Slawinski et al., 2018). Quan et al. (2024) reported that social aggression positively correlated with neuroticism and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, rule-breaking is defined as individual behaviours that do not conform to the group's normative standards (Kaplan, 1980, as cited in Zhang & Arvey, 2009) such as lying, stealing without confrontation, and vandalism.

The prevalence of antisocial behaviour is growing in Malaysia, especially among teenagers and young adults. Recent statistics show a significant rise in delinquent activities such as drug abuse, violent behaviour, and crime (Crime Statistics, 2024). Given its high prevalence, exploring the causes of antisocial behaviour would assist in preventing the long-term persistence of such behaviours and developing preventing strategies. Parenting style has been reported as one of the major contributing factors to antisocial behaviour. Parental styles and behaviours directly impact the child's needs and the development of specific attitudes and traits (Kompirović et al., 2020). Diana Baumrind, a psychologist, categorized parenting styles into four types: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2022). However, this study focuses specifically on authoritarian

parenting style, as Yim (2022) reported that parents who strongly adhere to Asian cultural values are more likely to adopt authoritarian practices. Given that the present study focuses on the Malaysian population, examining this particular parenting style is considered especially relevant.

According to Baumrind (1966, as cited in Kompirović et al., 2020), an authoritarian parenting style is characterized by rigorous behaviour, high expectations, a focus on conformity and discipline, and a lack of warmth and affection. The authoritarian parenting style enforces strict rules without justification, punishes mistakes, and upholds rigid standards without exceptions (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2022). Muftić and Updegrove (2017) found that parenting practices have a direct influence on adolescents' engagement in rule-breaking behaviours. Specifically, when parental warmth decreases, adolescents may seek emotional support elsewhere, which can increase their likelihood of affiliating with deviant peer groups.

Muhopilah et al. (2021) found that authoritarian parenting, extraversion, and conformity, had a positive and significant impact on bullying behaviour. Students with authoritarian parenting showed higher levels of extraversion and, showed greater conformity and were more likely to engage in bullying. However, many studies have focused on adolescents, creating a gap in our understanding of antisocial behaviour among young adults, particularly university students. University students are in the transition period of adolescence to adulthood. According to Keller et al. (2007), early adulthood has recently been defined as a period of willingly exploring one's identity, which includes trying out various possibilities and gradually moving towards making enduring decisions. Therefore, this present study will explore the relationship between antisocial behaviour and authoritarian parenting style among university students in Malaysia across genders.

OBJECTIVES

Given a greater understanding of authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour, the research questions in this study are:

RQ 1: Is there a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour among Malaysian university students?

RQ 2: Is there a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and physical aggression among Malaysian university students?

RQ 3: Is there a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and social aggression among Malaysian university students?

RQ 4: Is there a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and rule-breaking among Malaysian university students?

RQ 5: Are there gender differences in antisocial behaviour among Malaysian university students?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Population and Samples

Convenience sampling method was employed in recruiting the participants as given the limited time and resources available to reach university students from diverse locations in Malaysia, convenience sampling would be suitable for this study. The G power software was employed to determine the sample size. Based on the G-power analysis, with an effect size of 0.80 based on a previous study on the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour (Llorca et al., 2017), the current study aimed to recruit 150 Malaysian participants aged between 18 and 25 years who are currently enrolled in tertiary education institutions, regardless of gender.

2. Research Instrument

Demographic information such as age, race, gender, academic qualifications, and living dynamics were collected. Two main questionnaires utilised in this study were Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) Buri (1991), and Subtypes of Antisocial Behaviour Questionnaire (STAB) (Burt & Donnellan, 2009).

PAQ was designed to assess Baumrind's three parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. The scale contains 30 items. However, only the items related to authoritarian parenting style would be used. One of the example items is, "Even if their children did not agree with them, my parents felt that it was for our good if we were forced to conform to what they thought were right." Participants responded based on their perception of their parents' behaviours and attitudes. Items were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither agree nor disagree, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree. The scores of the ten items of authoritarian parenting style were summed up, and the higher scores indicate higher levels of authoritarian parenting style. The PAQ demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.74 to 0.87 (Buri, 1991).

STAB assessed three subtypes of antisocial behaviour: physical aggression, social aggression, and rule breaking. The scale contains 32 items. There are ten items for physical aggression, eleven items for social aggression, and eleven items for rule breaking. One of the example items is "Felt like hitting people." Participants rated how often they engaged in antisocial behaviours over a specified period. Items were scored on a five-point Likert scale from (1) Never, (2) Hardly ever, (3) Sometimes, (4) Frequently, and (5) Nearly all the time. Scores for each subtype were summed separately, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency toward

that specific antisocial behaviour. The STAB demonstrates good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.78 to 0.89 (Burt & Donnellan, 2009).

3. Collection of Data

The data collection started after obtaining ethical approval from the Raffles University Research Ethics Committee. To recruit participants, a recruitment poster containing a QR code and survey link was disseminated through social media platforms. Individuals who met the inclusion criteria were able to access the online questionnaire through the provided link. Prior to participation, individuals were presented with an informed consent form highlighting the study's aims and procedures, as well as their rights to confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary withdrawal without penalty. Only those who reviewed and agreed to the consent form were permitted to proceed with the questionnaire. The questionnaire took approximately five to seven minutes to complete. Upon completion, participants were provided with a debriefing form explaining the purpose of the study and additional relevant information.

4. Data Analysis

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarise participants' demographic characteristics and the main study variables. For inferential analysis, Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationships between authoritarian parenting style and the subtypes of antisocial behaviour, namely physical aggression, social aggression, and rule-breaking behaviour. In addition, an independent samples t-test was performed to determine whether there were significant gender differences in antisocial behaviour.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis of Participants' Demographic Variables

A total of 174 participants were involved in this study. The participants were aged between 18 and 25 years ($M = 21.78$, $SD = 1.64$). In terms of gender distribution, females comprised the majority of the sample ($N = 104$, 59.77%), compared to males. With regard to ethnicity, the largest proportion of participants were Chinese ($N = 72$, 41.38%), followed by Indian ($N = 53$, 30.46%) and Malay participants ($N = 49$, 28.16%) (refer Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Variables of the Participants

Demographic Variables	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	21.78	1.64		
Gender				
Male			70	40.23
Female			104	59.77
Non-binary			0	0
Race				
Chinese			72	41.38
Malay			49	28.16
Indian			53	30.46
Educational level				
Pre-university/ Foundation/ Diploma			43	23.56
Bachelor's Degree			123	70.69
Master's Degree			6	3.45
Doctorate (PhD)			2	1.15

Authoritarian parenting style as measured by the PAQ had a mean score of 26.16 ($SD = 9.06$) which indicates a moderate level of perceived authoritarian parenting style among the participants. Antisocial behaviour as assessed using the STAB had a mean score of 64.22 ($SD = 28.79$) indicating a low level of antisocial behaviour among participants. Within antisocial behaviour, there are three subtypes to measure, which are physical aggression with a mean score of 22.94 ($SD = 9.44$); social aggression had a mean score of 17.54 ($SD = 10.93$); and rule-breaking with a mean score of 23.74 ($SD = 10.25$) reflecting a low level of the subtypes of antisocial behaviour among participants.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour. The result revealed a moderate positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and antisocial

behaviour, which is statistically significant, $r(174) = .366$, $p < .001$. This indicates that there is a moderate association between authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour as the level of authoritarian parenting style increases, the level of antisocial behaviour increases too (refer to Table 2).

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and physical aggression. The result revealed a moderate positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and physical aggression, which is statistically significant, $r(174) = .442$, $p < .001$. This indicates that there is a moderate association between authoritarian parenting style and physical aggression as the level of authoritarian parenting style increases, the level of physical aggression increases too.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and social aggression. The result revealed a moderate positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and social aggression, which is statistically significant, $r(174) = .319$, $p < .001$. This indicates that there is a moderate association between authoritarian parenting style and social aggression as the level of authoritarian parenting style increases, the level of social aggression increases as well.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and rule-breaking. The result revealed a weak positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and rule-breaking, which is statistically significant, $r(174) = .285$, $p < .001$. This indicates that there is weak association between authoritarian parenting style and rule breaking.

Table 2: Correlation between Authoritarian Parenting Style and Antisocial Behaviour

Variables	n	M	SD	1
1. Authoritarian Parenting Style	174	26.16	9.06	-
2. Antisocial Behaviour	174	64.22	38.79	0.366
3. Physical Aggression	174	22.94	9.44	0.442
4. Social Aggression	174	17.54	10.93	0.319
5. Rule-breaking	174	23.74	10.25	0.285

** $p < 0.01$ (Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed))

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to examine gender differences in antisocial behaviour, as the data were not normally distributed. The results showed no statistically significant difference in antisocial behaviour scores between males ($Mdn = 58.00$) and females ($Mdn = 55.00$), $U = 3216.00$, $Z = -1.30$, $p = .193$. This finding suggests that antisocial behaviour did not significantly differ based on gender (refer to Table 3).

Table 3: Gender Differences on Antisocial Behaviour

Variables	Median		Mann-Whitney, U
	Male	Female	Standardized test statistics, Z
Antisocial behaviour	58.00	55.00	p-value
			$U = 3216.00$, $Z = -1.30$, $p = .193$

** $p < 0.01$ (Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed))

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour, particularly physical aggression, social aggression, and rule-breaking among university students in Malaysia. Besides, to explore the gender differences in antisocial behaviour among university students in Malaysia. Descriptive analysis indicated that participants reported a moderate level of authoritarian parenting style within this population. This finding contrasts with previous research (Yim, 2022), which suggested that the majority of Asian parents tend to employ an authoritarian parenting style. The observed moderate level may imply that contemporary Asian parents are increasingly adopting different parenting approaches rather than relying solely on authoritarian practices.

The findings of this study reveal that authoritarian parenting style is positively associated with various forms of antisocial behaviours among university students in Malaysia, though the strength of these associations varies. Specifically, a moderate positive correlation was found between authoritarian parenting and both general antisocial behaviour and physical aggression, indicating that individuals perceiving their parents as more controlling and harsher tend to exhibit higher levels of antisocial tendencies and physically aggressive behaviours. These results are consistent with prior research, with Shah et al. (2023) and Shahzadi et al. (2024) linking authoritarian parenting to elevated antisocial behaviour and suicidal ideation, and Arzeen et al. (2023) and De la Torre-Cruz et al. (2014) demonstrating its association with adolescent aggression. Attachment theory provides insight into these patterns, suggesting that insufficient emotional warmth and inconsistent responsiveness from caregivers can foster insecure attachment, poor emotion regulation, empathy deficits, and a predisposition toward externalising behaviours. Similarly, authoritarian parenting was

moderately related to social aggression, including bullying, social exclusion, and indirect forms of manipulation, consistent with findings from Muhopilah et al. (2021), highlighting how controlling and verbally hostile parenting can shape socially aggressive behaviours through learned dominance and emotional repression.

In contrast, the relationship between authoritarian parenting and rule-breaking behaviours was weaker, though still significant, suggesting that cultural factors may moderate this association. In particular, the predominantly Chinese sample in this study, influenced by collectivist values, respect for authority, and filial piety, may perceive authoritarian parenting as normative, reducing tendencies toward rule-breaking despite exposure to harsh parenting practices. This aligns with research by Liu and Wang (2018), who found that perceived normativeness of parental discipline can mediate its impact on externalising behaviours. Overall, while authoritarian parenting is an important predictor of antisocial and aggressive behaviours, it is not the sole determinant, with other factors such as peer influence, personality traits, socioeconomic pressures, and broader cultural norms also contributing to these behavioural outcomes.

Regarding gender differences in antisocial behaviour among Malaysian university students, the results indicated no statistically significant difference in antisocial behaviour scores between male and female participants. The mean rank for males was slightly higher than females, but the difference was not statistically significant. These findings indicate that gender does not have a significant influence on the expression of antisocial behaviour in the sample group. This result contradicts some of the previous research that has generally attributed greater levels of antisocial behaviour to males. For instance, Mobarake (2015) found that males reported significantly more antisocial behaviour compared to females, and older adolescents tend to exhibit more frequent antisocial behaviours than younger ones. Moreover, Brindle et al. (2019) reported that females tend to exhibit fewer antisocial and risky behaviours, potentially due to superior emotional self-regulation. The observed discrepancies in the current findings may be attributed to the lower prevalence of antisocial and aggressive behaviours among the Chinese population (Zhou et al., 2024). Given that the majority of participants in this study were Chinese, this demographic composition likely accounts for the pattern observed.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The study's findings provide practical insights that may be implemented in a variety of fields, including mental health, education, research, and public awareness. Recognising the correlation between an authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour, including physical aggression, social aggression, and rule-breaking highlights the importance of a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to reducing the risks of antisocial behaviour among university students in Malaysia. The findings emphasise the importance of taking early family dynamics, particularly authoritarian parenting, into account when conducting clinical assessments and psychotherapies. University counsellors, psychologists, and therapists should take into account to recognise behavioural and emotional issues that may arise from punitive, emotionally distant, or overly controlling parental situations. Additionally, this research has significant implications for the general public, particularly parents and caregivers. The findings showed that authoritarian parenting, while typically using discipline and control, may unintentionally contribute to the development of unhealthy behaviours in children that persist into early adulthood. Parents should be aware of the long-term psychological and social effects of harsh discipline, a lack of warmth, and emotional disengagement. Public health campaigns, school-based parenting programs, and community education projects may help to promote healthier, more balanced parenting styles, such as authoritative parenting, which combines established boundaries with the presence of emotional response.

Despite the valuable information gathered from this study, some limitations should be acknowledged. The demographic distribution of participants was rather unequal, especially in terms of race. The majority of respondents (41.38%) identified as Chinese, followed by Indians (30.46%) and Malays (28.16%). This imbalance may affect the generalisability of the findings to the larger population of Malaysian university students, particularly given Malaysia's ethnically varied society. To overcome these limitations, future research should seek more demographic balance by ensuring equal participation across gender, ethnicity, and geographical regions. This will increase the generalisability of the findings and enable comparative evaluations of different cultural or ethnic parenting standards in Malaysia.

Moreover, the study used only quantitative approaches, such as self-report questionnaires, which may underestimated the complexity of participants' experiences. Self-reported data are subject to social desirability bias, particularly when reporting sensitive behaviours such as aggressiveness or rule breaking. Thus, future research is encouraged to use mixed-methods or qualitative approaches to enhance the quantitative findings.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study investigated the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and antisocial behaviour, specifically physical aggression, social aggression, and rule-breaking among university students in Malaysia and discovered that authoritarian parenting was positively associated with all forms of antisocial behaviour, with physical aggression showing the strongest correlation. The findings supported well-established theories such as Baumrind's Parenting Style Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which all explain how strict, punitive, and emotionally distant parenting contributes to maladaptive behavioural development. Furthermore, the non-statistically significant gender differences are consistent with previous

study, which states that peer influence and socioeconomic factors may influence antisocial behaviour than gender. These findings have crucial practical implications for mental health professionals, educators, researchers, and parents, by highlighting the long-term impact of authoritarian parenting style. Although the study had its limitations, it provides the foundation for future research to get deeper insight into the relationship between authoritarian parenting and antisocial behaviour.

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Authors Contribution

Liew Ting: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Writing - Original Draft Validation, Supervision, Project Administration;
Shubashini Mathialagan: Conceptualization, Validation, Writing - Review & Editing

Conflicts Of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Statement

The Raffles University Research Ethics Committee (RUREC) has granted approval for this study.

Consent To Participate

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the administration of the questionnaire.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Consent For Publication

Not applicable

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