



## The Effects of Authoritarian Parenting Style on Black Teenage Males

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### Abstract

This paper explores the impact of authoritarian parenting styles on the mental health, social skills, and substance use of adolescent black males. Through a review of existing literature, it delves into the detrimental effects of authoritarian parenting, emphasizing its link to reduced self-confidence, heightened signs of depression, and heightened vulnerability to substance use among black teenagers. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Empowerment Theory, the study contextualizes the issue within broader environmental and empowerment frameworks, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive interventions. While state and federal policies, such as Medicaid and Mental Health Parity Acts, indirectly address mental health disparities, gaps remain in addressing the specific challenges faced by black adolescent males who have been subjected to authoritarian parenting. Evidence-based interventions like Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Multisystemic Therapy (MST), and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) offer promising avenues for promoting positive parenting practices and addressing the multifaceted needs of this population. Further research and culturally tailored interventions are needed to address the unique challenges faced by black adolescent males within authoritarian parenting contexts.

**Keywords:** Authoritarian Parenting; Mental Health; Social Skills; Substance Use; Adolescent Black Males; Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory; Empowerment Theory; Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT); Multi-systemic Therapy (MST); Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

This study aims to investigate the impact of parenting styles, particularly the authoritarian approach, on the mental health, social skills, and substance use of adolescent black males. This topic is important because research suggests that the family environment plays a crucial role in shaping children's behavior, serving as a foundation where their actions are expressed, learned, encouraged, and discouraged [1]. Traditionally, parents have been seen as responsible for preparing their children for adulthood by implementing rules and discipline. Since parents are the initial individuals that children encounter, they are more likely to imitate what they observe or are taught. However, during adolescence, peer influence becomes significant in shaping behavior. Despite the growing influence of peers, studies consistently show that parenting plays a more substantial role in influencing adolescent behavior than any other factor. Adolescence can be a challenging period for both parents and their children, making it crucial to recognize the

importance of maintaining high-quality parenting [1]. The impact of parenting during adolescence extends into adulthood, influencing behaviors in the long term. This paper will focus on reviewing research that specifically examines the influence of authoritarian parenting on black adolescent males. How does this parenting style affect their mental health, social skills, and substance use?

### Statement and scope of the problem

Authoritarian parenting can be problematic because it is defined as a strict style of parenting that places high expectations on the child by setting rigid rules without explanation, expecting children to obey without question or suffer harsh consequences. The problem of authoritarian parenting affecting children is not limited to specific characteristics or demographics at local, state, or federal levels [1]. Authoritarian parenting can impact children across vari-

ous socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and geographical locations. However, the extent and display of the impact may vary based on individual and cultural factors. Authoritarian parenting often begins to manifest during a child's early years when parents establish rules and expectations. The impact of authoritarian parenting may become more pronounced during adolescence as children seek autonomy and identity development. Parenting styles are often transmitted across generations. If parents were raised in households that practiced authoritarian parenting, they might replicate these patterns in their own families without necessarily questioning the approach. Authoritarian parenting might be perceived as a coping mechanism for parents navigating complex societal challenges. In environments with perceived external threats, parents may adopt a strict approach to protect their children [1].

Research states that around 3.7 million adolescents in the United States go through at least one major depressive episode annually, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [2]. Among these, Black American adolescents account for 14% of reported major depressive episodes in nearly four million adolescents nationwide [2]. In essence, the issue holds significance because it is widespread, disproportionately affecting Black American adolescents and leading to mental health disparities with broader implications for public health. Tackling this problem requires a thorough strategy involving targeted interventions, awareness initiatives, and advocacy to safeguard the well-being of all adolescents.

### Literature Review

While researching the effects of authoritarian parenting on black adolescents' mental health, several articles were reviewed, and it was found that this parenting style negatively affects their mental health. The first article reviewed stated that authoritarian parenting, in comparison to authoritative parenting, is perceived as less supportive. Unwanted behaviors are met with punishing responses, highlighting conformity over principles that promote independence. Youth raised by less supportive parents tend to report lower self-efficacy and self-esteem, which are predictors of increased depressive symptoms [3]. Concerning black male youth, this article further explains that the experience of depressive symptoms in youth under authoritarian parenting is influenced by race, age, and gender. Black males subjected to authoritarian parenting exhibit more internalized depressive symptoms than their female counterparts [3]. Harsh parenting, encompassing verbal harsh discipline and corporal punishment, predicts depression in black adolescents that persists into adulthood [4]. Elevated

conflict within black families is often met with the application of harsh verbal discipline [5]. In households where physical punishment is applied, black adolescents tend to report elevated levels of depressive symptoms compared to their white counterparts. This difference might be revealing of the more frequent use of corporal punishment in black households [6].

One notable gap in research is the over-reliance on studies involving white middle-class families. There's a clear need for more work that investigates ethnically diverse samples to get a more comprehensive picture. To understand how parenting affects black adolescent males, more research must be done on this ethnic group [7]. Addressing cultural responsiveness involves creating interventions that consider the distinct experiences of Black Americans, both historically and in the present. This approach calls for a mix of perspectives, bringing in various stakeholders involved in serving Black youth, spanning from the community to institutional levels [3]. The goal is to ensure the effective implementation of practices that not only work but also lead to positive, lasting outcomes. Lastly, there's a need for a commitment to change deep-rooted beliefs related to intergenerational parenting practices. The shift should turn away from methods that might have negative outcomes and instead embrace healthier parenting approaches. These should offer protective factors and act as buffers against depressive symptoms [3]. Ultimately, social workers, therapists, and society must adopt a more informed approach when it comes to black communities and develop more culturally appropriate examples of how and what it looks like to parent black adolescent youth in America.

Looking ahead, we'll dive into the impact of authoritarian parenting on the communication style of Black adolescent youth. We will be using an article titled "Hugs, Not Hits: Warmth and Spanking as Predictors of Child Social Competence" because it delves into corporal punishment, a disciplinary method closely tied to authoritarian parenting. Spanking is frequently used as a strategy to manage and control a child's behavior. The question that this article answers is if the tactic of corporal punishment affects a child's social competence or their ability to communicate effectively. This article used a longitudinal study of urban families from twenty U.S. cities with more participants coming from children who were birthed out of wedlock. Surveys were issued to the mothers to record the frequency of spanking and if it was used when the child was misbehaving. And the child's social competence was measured by using the Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory using a nominal scale of zero to two with zero meaning not true and two meaning very true or often true. A few examples of statements that the moth-

ers would rate relating to their children were: “understands others’ feelings, is open and direct about what he/she wants, enjoys talking with you, can easily get other children to pay attention to him/her” [8]. The findings of this study suggest that professionals engaging with children should discourage the use of spanking by parents, as it proves ineffective in promoting prosocial behavior. Instead, the emphasis should be on encouraging parents to adopt a warm and responsive approach. The results also imply that even when parents incorporate both warmth and spanking, the positive impact of warmth on children’s social competence may be compromised by the heightened aggression linked to spanking. In conclusion, these findings highlight the importance for parents to refrain from using spanking and to opt for positive parenting techniques, like warmth, to nurture favorable behaviors and communication in their children [8]. The gap noted within this study is it does not expand to adolescence; more research must be done to include black male adolescents to be more culturally competent on this issue.

Lastly, we will look at the effects of authoritarian parenting style on black adolescent youth substance use. Substance abuse is recognized as a widespread social issue with detrimental impacts on physical, social, psychological, and spiritual well-being. It involves the excessive use of addictive substances, often for non-therapeutic purposes, aiming to alter the normal functioning of the mind and body. This problem is escalating globally, posing significant concerns that, if unaddressed, could lead to unprecedented disasters [9]. Within this study, data was collected via questionnaires, and the average age of the participants was 18-25. This study focused on college-age students and included multiple ethnicities. Although this paper focuses on teenage adolescent males, it is still important to see how maladaptive behaviors continue to increase as a person ages. Within this study, they tested the hypothesis that parenting styles including authoritarian parenting, peer pressure, and sex would be significantly associated with substance abuse [9]. It was proven that authoritarian parenting was significantly associated with more substance abuse. The thought is that college is a place where individuals begin to come into their own. If a person is subjected to a dictatorship while living with their parents, individuals may be more prone to try and explore things that they were not allowed to engage in while living with their parents.

A gap in this research was that it did not specifically address black adolescent males. This study was limited to one Nigerian university. To get more accurate results, this study should have been done in the United States, surveying several universities, including historically black colleges and universities. To get a better representation, it would be advantageous to widen the age range as well,

using a longitudinal study to see if substance abuse increased as the individual ages. Another article discusses the rise in substance use among adolescents and the vital role of integrating parenting skills into school programs to curb drug use [10]. Vidourek, *et al.* [11] explored factors influencing adolescent drug use nationally, drawing from data in the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, including 17,399 participants aged 12 to 17. The findings revealed significant predictors of drug use, with 25.3% reporting lifetime use, 18.9% reporting past-year use, and 10.1% reporting past-month use. Key factors included age, race/ethnicity, history of depression treatment, authoritarian parenting, negative school experiences, and legal involvement. These results emphasize the necessity for a comprehensive strategy that addresses various problem behavior theories to tackle adolescent illegal drug use on a national scale [10].

A gap that was noticed within this article was that it did not focus on black adolescent youth. The participant’s pool was very broad and there needed to be more emphasis on how much of the substance abuse was contributed to being subjected to authoritarian parenting.

### Theoretical framework

For the context of this paper, we will be examining two theories to help explain why the authoritarian parenting style poses such a risk to black adolescent males. These theories will offer a perspective for analyzing and addressing the problem. The two theories chosen to guide my research will be Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory and Empowerment Theory.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s and his theory provides a holistic view of understanding a person based on the environment that a person was subjected to as a child [12]. He argued that family plays an integral role in an individual’s development. Ecological systems theory evolved from a combination of systems theory, ecological theory, and bioecological systems theory. It explores the shared influence between individuals and the various systems—physical, interpersonal, social, political, and cultural—that shape their lives [13]. In social work, the ecological perspective is utilized to evaluate individuals within the framework of the various ecological systems they engage with. These systems include their family, peer group, neighborhood, community, and institutions like schools and workplaces. The assessment aims to determine the degree to which interactions within their environment are beneficial or detrimental [14]. The theory is strong because it gives a complete view of individuals, helping social workers and therapists understand a per-

son based on their childhood environment. Since parents have a crucial impact on a person's development, using this theory makes sense when explaining how authoritarian parenting can negatively affect adolescents' mental health, social skills, and substance use. One noticeable limitation is that the theory might not completely consider differences in cultures. It may require adjustments to be relevant across various populations with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Using the theory involves creating new and creative solutions drawn from the study. This might involve suggesting new policies, interventions, or practices that match the theory's principles and tackle the issues that authoritarian parenting causes. There should be close attention paid to cultural contexts to ensure that the theory's application respects diverse populations, specifically black adolescents.

The second theoretical framework researched was the Empowerment Theory. Empowerment is a concept that ties together individual strengths, natural support systems, and proactive actions with broader social policies and changes [15]. This theory, along with research and interventions, connects personal well-being to the wider social and political context. Essentially, it links mental health with mutual support and the effort to build responsive communities. Empowerment theory prompts us to consider wellness over illness, strengths over weaknesses, and capabilities rather than deficits. Empowerment-focused research emphasizes identifying capabilities rather than focusing solely on risk factors. It also explores how social problems are influenced by the environment rather than blaming individuals. Empowerment-based interventions aim to enhance overall well-being while addressing problems. They offer opportunities for participants to gain knowledge and skills, and they involve professionals as collaborators rather than authoritative figures [16]. Empowerment essentially involves both self-empowerment and the support provided by professionals, which helps individuals overcome feelings of powerlessness and recognize their own resources. The concept of empowerment originates from American community psychology and is credited to Julian Rappaport in 1981. However, its roots can be traced back further to Marxist sociological theory, and these ideas have been further developed through Neo-Marxist Theory, also known as Critical Theory. In social work, empowerment serves as a practical approach focused on resource-oriented intervention [17]. This theory was selected for an in-depth exploration of the issue. Existing research indicates that individuals exposed to authoritarian parenting often experience diminished self-confidence, heightened depression, and compromised social skills. Using this theory may

offer an opportunity for social workers and therapists to empower individuals, particularly black adolescent males, by developing self-awareness and potentially reshaping their self-perceptions. The limitations of this theory would be that there is not much research on the correlation between the empowerment theory and adolescents affected by authoritarian upbringing. There is room for more research around this area to provide this population with hope and a new outlook on life and their abilities.

### Policy application

#### State policy

Through research, it is evident that the way a person is parented affects a person's mental health, communication style, and substance use. With this knowledge, we must examine policies that study this social problem. We will examine state, federal, and global policies addressing this issue. At the state level, The Commission for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services in North Carolina, established in 1973 under the Executive Organization Act, operates with a mission to enhance prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation programs for individuals with mental illness, developmental disabilities, and substance use disorders [18]. The Commission has the power to create, amend, and revoke rules guiding state and local mental health services. Additionally, it holds the authority to adjust storage, security, transaction limits, and record-keeping requirements for specific pseudoephedrine products [18].

The policy permits the Commission the power to adopt rules related to education, prevention, and intervention for mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse. This can indirectly address issues related to authoritarian parenting by focusing on preventive measures and educational programs targeted at families and communities. While not directly addressing authoritarian parenting, controlling substance abuse is crucial in easing its effects on mental health and overall well-being. The crucial part is how these rules are put into action and understood, aiming to establish specific ways to help and support teenagers impacted by authoritarian parenting [18].

#### Federal policy

The federal policy that relates closest to our social issue is Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Programs; Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008; the Application of Mental Health Parity Requirements to Coverage Offered by Medicaid Managed Care Organizations, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and Alternative Benefit Plans. Within this act, the legisla-

tion aims to eliminate disparities in coverage between mental health and other medical services, promoting equal access to mental health and addiction treatment within these federally funded health programs. This act was governed by the Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services, and the regulations were made effective on May 31, 2016 [19]. The Medicaid and CHIP programs, under the Mental Health Parity Act, ensure that mental health services are provided with other medical services. Therefore, individuals, including adolescents, have improved access to mental health treatments, counseling, and therapy, which can indirectly address issues stemming from authoritarian parenting. While this federal policy may not overtly target authoritarian parenting, the emphasis on equalizing mental health coverage, promoting preventive services, and involving families indirectly contributes to addressing the mental health, communication, and substance abuse challenges faced by many adolescents in similar parenting environments [19].

### Global policy

The global policy highlighted is one from Canada that was published by the Canadian Pediatric Society in April of 2022 about Child and Youth Mental Health. The policy brief highlights the escalating mental health challenges faced by children and youth in Canada, increased by factors such as school closures, social isolation, and increased stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the popularity of mental health issues affecting over 1.2 million children and youth in Canada, less than 20% receive appropriate treatment. Those who are recent immigrants, refugees, BIPOC, or living in rural areas face even greater barriers to mental health care. The brief recommends early identification and intervention as critical measures, citing their potential lifelong impacts on health and well-being. It emphasizes the importance of a fully funded, culturally sensitive, and outcome-focused mental health system for children and youth [20].

The provided policy brief on Child and Youth Mental Health does not overtly focus on the effects of authoritarian parenting on adolescent mental health, communication, and substance abuse. However, several elements of the policy recommendations indirectly contribute to creating a more supportive environment that could benefit adolescents, including those affected by various parenting styles [20]. Through researching these policies, it is apparent that there is a lack of information specifically on the effects of authoritarian parenting on black male youth. More research must be done to bring more culturally competent awareness to this issue.

### Intervention application

Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) is an evidence-based treatment for young children with behavioral and emotional disorders. This is not particularly designed for adolescents, but its principles can be adapted. PCIT focuses on improving the parent-child relationship and enhancing parenting skills. It involves live coaching sessions where parents are guided to interact positively with their children, promoting effective communication and emotional regulation [21]. PCIT includes two phases: the Child-Directed Interaction (CDI) and Parent-Directed Interaction (PDI). During the CDI phase, therapists guide caregivers in play therapy and operant conditioning skills, aiming to advance warm and secure caregiver-child relationships. The PDI phase focuses on increasing child compliance and reducing disruptive behaviors. Clinicians typically observe sessions through a one-way mirror, providing live coaching for parenting behaviors. PCIT is distinct in its approach, treating caregivers and children as couples and emphasizing real-time coaching throughout both phases [21]. Research conducted in New Zealand found that at first, parents were unsure about the different strategies that PCIT offered; however, they found the treatment helpful, moving from feeling not good enough to being confident. Parents discovered that letting the child lead play, a key part of PCIT, worked surprisingly well [22].

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is another evidence-based treatment that could be used. It is designed to address serious conduct problems in adolescents. MST is family- and community-based, aiming to empower parents with the skills needed to address behavioral issues in their adolescents. Therapists work directly with families to improve parenting strategies, communication, and overall family functioning [23]. A recent study found that most adolescents who underwent Multisystemic Therapy (MST) showed positive changes in their emotional and behavioral issues after treatment, and these improvements lasted for a year. Caregivers also reported lasting enhancements in their mental health, parenting, and monitoring skills following their participation in MST. The treatment successfully achieved its goals by enhancing caregivers' ability to apply effective parenting skills, leading to positive behaviors in their children [24].

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is another evidence-based treatment that is widely used for treating substance abuse and related mental health issues in adolescents. CBT addresses distorted thought patterns and behaviors related to substance use. While not parenting-focused, it can be beneficial for adolescents dealing with the effects of authoritarian parenting by promoting healthier cop-

ing mechanisms and improving mental health [25]. A recent study assessed how well a culturally sensitive group using cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT) intervention worked for Chinese adolescents at risk of anxiety disorders in Hong Kong, along with the additional impacts of parental participation. This research showed that involving the parents in the CBT practices with their children improved their behaviors of anxiety [26].

Each of the discussed approaches shares a key strength, offering parents a well-defined structure for implementing positive parenting skills. This is crucial, considering research indicates that adolescents of authoritarian parents may experience harmful effects resulting from harsh discipline. Providing parents with an alternative approach is needed to better cater to the needs of their children. The limitations of these approaches are that they are not culturally specific, meaning there is not much research on how these approaches support black adolescent males.

One social intervention that could help solve the gaps in these approaches could be creating more opportunities for black families to experience different parenting approaches. Creating workshops and workbooks with examples of effective parenting for teenage black boys. This is lacking in research and would be beneficial for black families. Per the research, the most effective parenting style for black adolescent boys is authoritative or strict parenting, characterized by warmth, high expectations, involvement in decision-making, and clear boundaries [27]. Black males and their families should collaborate with mental health providers who possess cultural competence and can deliver trauma-focused therapy, PCIT, or alternative interventions while respecting their cultural heritage and backgrounds. Selecting the appropriate therapy should stem from the specific requirements and desires of the teenager and their family, considering cultural elements that may impact the success of treatment.

Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhances parent-child relationships</li> <li>- Improves child behavior and emotional regulation</li> <li>- Involves direct coaching and feedback to parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time-intensive, requiring consistent sessions</li> <li>- May not be suitable for all age groups</li> <li>- Requires parent participation</li> </ul>
Multisystemic Therapy (MST)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Addresses complex issues within the family and community context</li> <li>- Evidence-based, effective in reducing criminal behavior and substance abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highly intensive and demanding</li> <li>- Expensive and requires highly trained therapists</li> <li>- Limited availability in some regions</li> </ul>
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Versatile, effective for a range of disorders</li> <li>- Short-term and structured</li> <li>- Empowers individuals with coping strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May not address underlying issues for some patients</li> <li>- Requires active participation and homework</li> <li>- Less focus on emotion</li> </ul>

Table 1

**Discussion**

This research is a deep dive into understanding how authoritarian parenting affects the mental health, social skills, and substance use of adolescent black males. From reviewing the literature, it's evident that authoritarian parenting, with its strict and rigid approach, significantly impacts various aspects of adolescent development. Social interventions should prioritize culturally sensitive approaches, empowering black families to explore alternative parenting methods. Workshops, educational materials (positive parenting workbooks), and community-based programs will equip parents with practical tools and support networks. By addressing why parents choose authoritarian parenting and promoting positive parent-child interactions, new solutions have the potential to reduce the risk of mental health issues such as depression and

anxiety among black adolescent males. This project emphasizes the importance of cultural competence in both policy and practice solutions. By recognizing the unique experiences and challenges faced by black adolescent males, the solutions aim to be more inclusive and culturally appropriate.

Bronfenbrenner's theory highlighted the need to consider broader environmental contexts. While policies addressing mental health and substance abuse showed strengths in recognizing systemic influences, they often overlooked cultural distinctions within black families, suggesting a need for adapted approaches. Empowerment Theory emphasizes leveraging individual strengths. Interventions like PCIT and MST empowered parents to foster positive relationships yet lacked cultural sensitivity. Therefore, there is a need for more approaches to support black families effectively.

## Conclusion

This study explores the impact of authoritarian parenting on the mental health, social skills, and substance use of black adolescent males. Research indicates that these teens may encounter greater challenges in emotional well-being and substance use when raised in strict households. However, the existing literature often overlooks the experiences of black teenage boys, highlighting the need for further investigation in this area. It is imperative that any interventions developed are culturally sensitive and consider the unique perspectives of Black Americans. Theories such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Empowerment Theory offer a valuable understanding of addressing these challenges. Additionally, policy initiatives like Medicaid and CHIP aim to ensure fair access to mental health services. Interventions such as Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Multisystemic Therapy (MST), and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) provide support for parents and teens, yet there remains a need for interventions specifically tailored to the distinct needs of teenage black boys. There is still a significant amount of work needed to address the issues that arise from authoritarian parenting, and it falls upon social workers, therapists, policymakers, and the community to act and bring about necessary changes.

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