

Parental Knowledge of Child Temperament and Its Association with Parenting Practices Among Middle-Class Families in Kerala

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Abstract—Child temperament represents biologically rooted individual differences in emotional reactivity and self-regulation that shape how children respond to people, situations, and environmental demands. Parenting practices, in turn, influence children's emotional, behavioural, and social development. The present study proposes to examine parental knowledge of child temperament and its association with parenting practices among middle-class families in Kerala. The study is grounded in the concept of goodness of fit, which emphasizes the compatibility between children's temperamental characteristics and the demands and responses of their caregiving environment. A mixed-methods design is proposed, combining quantitative assessment of parental knowledge, child temperament, and parenting practices with qualitative exploration of parents' experiences and decision-making. The study focuses on parents of children in the 3–12-year age range residing in Kerala. Quantitative data are proposed to be examined using correlational and regression-based approaches, while qualitative data will be analysed to identify contextual and culturally relevant patterns. The study is intended to contribute to a more culturally grounded understanding of temperament-sensitive parenting in Kerala and to inform parent education, psychological interventions, and professional training.

Index Terms—Child Temperament, Goodness of Fit, Middle-Class Families, Parental Knowledge, Parenting Practices, Kerala, Temperament-Sensitive Parenting

I. INTRODUCTION

Child development is shaped by the continuous interaction between individual characteristics and the environments in which children grow. Within this process, the parent–child relationship constitutes an important context for emotional regulation,

behavioural development, personality formation, and social competence. One individual characteristic that is particularly relevant to these processes is temperament.

Temperament refers to biologically rooted individual differences in emotional reactivity and self-regulation that are evident from early life. These differences may be expressed through patterns of mood, activity level, adaptability, attention, emotional intensity, and sensitivity to environmental stimuli. Although temperament is not synonymous with personality, it provides an important foundation for understanding how children typically respond to their surroundings.

The significance of temperament for parenting lies not simply in identifying differences among children, but in understanding how caregivers respond to those differences. A parenting strategy that is effective for one child may be less effective for another. For example, a child who is highly reactive may require predictable routines, gradual transitions, and calm, consistent responses, whereas a more adaptable child may respond comfortably to greater variation in daily experiences. The concept of goodness of fit therefore provides a useful framework for understanding the compatibility between a child's characteristics and the expectations and responses of the caregiving environment.

The Kerala context provides a meaningful setting in which to examine this relationship. Social changes including the growth of nuclear families, urbanisation, and increasing educational aspirations have influenced family life and parenting expectations. High educational attainment and access to information do not necessarily ensure awareness of psychological concepts or their application in everyday parenting.

Consequently, parents may possess substantial educational resources while having limited understanding of temperament and its implications for parenting.

The present study therefore focuses on the relationship between parental knowledge of child temperament and parenting practices among middle-class families in Kerala. Rather than considering parenting practices independently of the child, the study examines whether parents' understanding of temperament is reflected in the ways they respond to their children's individual characteristics.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Thomas and Chess provided an influential framework for understanding temperament by identifying nine temperament characteristics and introducing the concept of goodness of fit. Their work emphasised that developmental outcomes are influenced not only by the child's characteristics but also by the compatibility between those characteristics and the surrounding environment [1].

Rothbart's model further conceptualised temperament in terms of dimensions including extraversion/surgency, negative affectivity, and effortful control. This framework highlights the multidimensional nature of temperament and the importance of considering individual differences in emotional and behavioural regulation [2].

Research on parenting styles has also provided an important framework for examining caregiver behaviour. Baumrind distinguished major parenting patterns, including authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive styles, with later work identifying neglectful parenting. These approaches differ in their levels of responsiveness, warmth, control, and behavioural expectations and have been associated with different developmental experiences for children [3].

The literature reviewed in the source study indicates that child temperament and parenting behaviour are closely interrelated. Sahithya and Raman reported a significant association between parenting style and child temperament, particularly in relation to child anxiety [4]. Sulthana Raj and Jethwani reported that authoritative parenting was associated with reduced stress among adolescents from tribal communities in

Wayanad, highlighting the importance of cultural context in understanding parenting [5].

The reviewed district-level evidence from Ernakulam identified authoritative parenting as prevalent and associated with positive academic and emotional outcomes [6]. A qualitative study from Trivandrum suggested that changing family structures and disciplinary practices may influence parental warmth [7]. A South Indian study further highlighted the potential value of meta-emotion coaching for toddlers showing high reactivity and emotional dysregulation [8].

Studies discussed by Rao et al. and Bhattacharya and Sengupta indicate that traditional Indian parenting practices may be strongly shaped by cultural expectations, sometimes taking precedence over child-specific approaches [9], [10]. An Indian study reported in 2024 further suggested that children's anger and reactivity may elicit harsh parental responses, potentially contributing to further behavioural difficulties [11].

Taken together, the reviewed literature supports the importance of examining parenting within the context of children's individual characteristics. However, the literature available to the present study suggests that research in Kerala has paid comparatively limited attention to the specific relationship between parents' knowledge of temperament and the extent to which this knowledge is reflected in actual parenting practices.

III. RESEARCH GAP AND RATIONALE

Although international literature has established the importance of temperament and parenting as interacting influences on child development, a contextual gap remains in understanding how parents' knowledge of temperament translates into everyday parenting behaviour within Kerala. Existing work tends to examine temperament, parenting style, or child outcomes separately, while comparatively less attention is given to the alignment between parental awareness and parenting responses.

This gap is particularly relevant in a context where educational attainment, changing family structures, and evolving expectations of parenting coexist with culturally embedded beliefs about discipline and child development. Examining parental knowledge alongside parenting practices may therefore provide a

more meaningful understanding of temperament-sensitive parenting in Kerala.

The study is consequently designed to contribute to the movement from general parenting advice towards approaches that recognise individual differences among children and the cultural context in which parenting occurs.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTION

How knowledgeable are middle-class parents in Kerala about child temperament profiles, and to what extent do their parenting practices align with their children's temperamental characteristics?

V. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To assess the level of parental knowledge regarding child temperament profiles.
- 2) To examine prevailing parenting practices among middle-class families in Kerala.
- 3) To examine the degree of alignment between parenting practices and children's temperament characteristics.
- 4) To identify gaps in parental awareness and develop evidence-informed recommendations for temperament-sensitive parenting.

VI. METHOD

6.1 Research Design

A mixed-methods research design is proposed to examine the relationship between parental knowledge, child temperament, and parenting practices. The quantitative component will provide measurable estimates of parental knowledge and parenting patterns, while the qualitative component will provide contextual understanding of how parents interpret children's behaviour and make parenting decisions.

6.2 Participants

The proposed participants are parents from middle-class families residing in Kerala who have children between 3 and 12 years of age. The study is delimited to this developmental period because children's temperamental characteristics and behavioural patterns become increasingly observable while parental influence remains substantial.

6.3 Measures and Data Collection

Validated psychological measures assessing child temperament and parenting practices will be used. A measure of parental knowledge regarding temperament will also be employed. Structured interviews or focus-group discussions will be used to obtain qualitative information concerning parents' understanding of temperament, interpretations of children's behaviour, and approaches to managing temperament-related challenges.

Data collection will focus on three related domains: parental knowledge of temperament, parenting practices, and observable or reported child behavioural and developmental characteristics. The qualitative component will provide additional insight into cultural and contextual factors that may influence parenting decisions.

6.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Correlation and regression analyses are proposed to examine associations between parental knowledge, parenting practices, and relevant child outcomes. Qualitative data will be analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in parents' beliefs, experiences, and responses to children's temperamental characteristics.

6.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation should be voluntary, with informed consent obtained from participating parents. Confidentiality and anonymity should be maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting. Data should be used solely for the stated research purpose, and participants should be informed of their right to withdraw from the study in accordance with applicable institutional research requirements.

VII. SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS

The study is limited to middle-class families residing in Kerala and is therefore intended to provide a context-specific understanding rather than a universally generalisable account of parenting. Socio-economic, cultural, and regional characteristics may influence parenting beliefs and practices, and findings should consequently be interpreted within the context in which the study is conducted. The study focuses on

children aged 3–12 years and does not seek to represent parenting practices across all developmental stages.

VIII. EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study is expected to contribute to developmental and family psychology by examining the relationship between what parents know about temperament and how they respond to their children in everyday life. Its findings may strengthen the emerging literature on culturally contextualised parenting in India and, specifically, in Kerala.

At the applied level, the findings may inform parent-education programmes, psychological counselling, school-based family interventions, and professional training for educators and mental-health practitioners. Intervention content could include recognising temperament characteristics, distinguishing temperament from intentional misbehaviour, adapting expectations and communication, using developmentally appropriate discipline, and strengthening parent–child relationships.

The study may also provide a foundation for culturally sensitive parenting resources that move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches. Such resources could help parents recognise individual differences while maintaining appropriate boundaries, warmth, and consistency.

IX. CONCLUSION

Child temperament is an important dimension of individual difference that shapes children’s responses to their environments and interacts dynamically with parenting. Understanding this interaction is particularly relevant when parenting expectations are influenced by changing family structures, educational aspirations, and culturally embedded beliefs.

The proposed study addresses a contextual gap by examining parental knowledge of temperament alongside parenting practices among middle-class families in Kerala. By bringing together developmental theory, empirical evidence, and culturally situated parenting experiences, the study seeks to clarify how psychological knowledge about children is translated into everyday caregiving. Ultimately, a better understanding of temperament-sensitive parenting may support more responsive

parent–child relationships and contribute to healthier emotional, behavioural, and social development.

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