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Parenting styles of Finnish parents and their associations with parental burnout

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Abstract

In the present study, we examined what kind of parenting style groups (defined by parental warmth, behavioral control, and psychological control) can be identified among contemporary Finnish mothers and fathers and how these parenting style groups are associated with parents' symptoms of parental burnout. Gender differences in parenting style groups, and in their associations with parental burnout, were also investigated. The survey data were gathered from 1,471 Finnish parents (91.2% mothers). The results of k-means cluster analysis identified six different parenting style groups: authoritarian (13.5%), permissive (15.2%), psychologically controlling (19.4%), uninvolved (14.4%), controlling (12.4%), and authoritative (25.1%), with the authoritative parenting style being the most common. The identified parenting style groups were equally common for mothers and fathers. The results showed further that, independently of gender, parents applying the authoritarian parenting style experienced symptoms of parental burnout the most, whereas those with the authoritative or permissive style reported these symptoms the least. Based on the results, it is suggested that child health care and family centers should pay particular attention to potential risk groups such as parents reporting symptoms of parental burnout and parents characterized by an authoritarian parenting style.

Keywords Finnish parents · Parental burnout · Parenting styles · Authoritarian parenting

There is considerable empirical evidence demonstrating that authoritative parenting characterized by high levels of parental warmth combined with behavioral control is associated with positive child outcomes (e.g., school achievement, psychological well-being), whereas the lack of warmth; coercive, authoritarian parenting; and uninvolved or neglectful parenting predict more negative developmental outcomes (Luo et al., 2021; Pinquart, 2016; Rose et al., 2018; Smetana, 2017; Smetana & Ahmad, 2018). Although some cross-cultural differences in these associations have been reported in the field of children's educational attainment and school achievement (for a review, see Chen et al., 2019), the benefits of authoritative parenting have been demonstrated across different cultures (Liu & Merritt, 2018; Luo et al.,

2021; Smetana & Ahmad, 2018; Sorkhabi & Mandara, 2013; Steinberg, 2001). The fact that knowledge about optimal parenting styles is constantly growing (Larzelere et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey & Stewart, 2019) can affect how common the different parenting styles are among contemporary parents. Besides the increasing knowledge about adaptive parenting styles, cultural changes over time may play a role in the prevalence of certain parenting styles, as the cultural beliefs, norms, and values in society are reflected in parental socialization goals and guide the social judgments of specific parenting behaviors (Chen et al., 2019; see also, Bornstein, 2012). For example, in Western cultures a major socialization goal during the last few decades has been to help children develop autonomy and self-expression, and, therefore, social initiative has been strongly valued and encouraged in childrearing (Chen et al., 2019). Due to this, it might be assumed that among contemporary parents in Western cultures coercive authoritarian parenting that discourages social initiative is less common than in the past.

In addition to changes in knowledge and culture affecting parenting styles over time, another key factor influencing parenting styles is parental well-being. In this regard, parents

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with low psychological well-being (evidenced, for example, as a high level of depressive symptoms or parenting stress) deploy, on average, more maladaptive parenting styles in terms of child development, whereas parents showing high well-being are likely to report more adaptive parenting styles (e.g., Aunola et al., 1999, 2015; Fonseca et al., 2020). Recently, parental burnout, which is an alarm indicator of parental low psychological well-being and chronic parenting stress, has been acknowledged as a phenomenon of individualistic Western countries in particular (Roskam et al., 2021). Thus far, however, little is known as to what extent symptoms of parental burnout are associated with different parenting styles. Consequently, the present study investigated the parenting style groups among today's Finnish parents and the associations of these parenting style groups with the symptoms of parental burnout.

Parenting Styles

Parenting style has been defined as a relatively stable aspect of the parent–child interaction, reflected in a constellation of attitudes toward parenting practices and an emotional climate in which the parent's behaviors are expressed (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). According to the traditional parenting style typology (Baumrind, 1971, 2013), parenting styles can be divided into qualitatively different styles based on two parenting dimensions: *demandingness* (i.e., a parent's efforts to control their child's behavior and demand maturity from the child) and *responsiveness* (i.e., refers to how sensitive and accepting a parent is to their child's emotional and developmental needs). In Baumrind's typology, authoritative parenting is characterized by the combination of warmth, sensitivity, and the setting of appropriate limits for the child. In contrast, authoritarian parenting is characterized by parental control, low levels of warmth, and an attempt to shape the behavior and attitudes of the child. Permissive parenting, on the other hand, is characterized by abundant parental warmth, the avoidance of control, and a non-punitive manner toward the child's actions. Finally, rejecting-neglecting parenting (also known as neglectful, disengaged or uninvolved parenting; see for example, Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Baumrind, 2013; Kuppens, & Ceulemans, 2019) is characterized by the lack of both demandingness and responsiveness. This four-fold typology of parenting styles has been widely used in the research literature (e.g., Larzelere et al., 2013; Steinberg, 2001).

In the research field, different terms have been used to refer to the two parenting style dimensions. For example, besides the term responsiveness, terms such as parental warmth, affection, acceptance, nurturance, emotional involvement, and supportiveness have been used to refer to the sensitive identification of the child's needs, the

expression of positive feelings toward the child, and the expression of enthusiasm and praise toward the child's accomplishments (Aunola & Nurmi, 2004; Larzelere et al., 2013). Similarly, as a synonym for demandingness, researchers have used the term control to refer the consistent regulation of the child's behavior and the creation of clear and appropriate limits for the child's activities to foster their socialization (Barber, 1996; Smetana, 2017). Later, however, control was divided into two different forms: *behavioral control* and *psychological control* (Barber, 1996). Whereas behavioral control refers to clear and consistent limit-setting and maturity demands, psychological control refers to the intrusive and manipulative activity of a parent that is intended to influence the child's emotions and thoughts by guilt-induction, shaming, and love withdrawal (Barber, 1996; see also, Aunola et al., 2017; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Behavioral and psychological control, therefore, differ in terms of where the control exercised by the parent is directed; that is, whereas behavioral control aims to influence the child's behavior, psychological control aims to influence the child's emotional life (Barber & Xia, 2013).

Although previous research has widely demonstrated that parenting styles play a role in children's and adolescents' development and adjustment (Pinquart, 2016; Rose et al., 2018; Smetana, 2017), the research around parenting style typology has mainly focused on the traditional typology, neglecting the third introduced parenting style dimension, that is, psychological control (as exceptions, see Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019; Smetana & Ahmad, 2018). Although research into psychological control has been increasing, there is not yet a common view in the field of research on the three-dimensional parenting styles. Moreover, although it is plausible that parenting styles change across historical time based on various societal changes (Harkness & Super, 2002, 2021), little is known about the proportions of different parenting style groups among parents in today's societies. Thus, the first aim of the present study was to determine what kind of parenting style groups can be found among contemporary Finnish parents and how common are the different groups. By applying cluster analysis to identify parenting style groups rather than focusing on any predetermined groups, we aimed to find out what kind of naturally occurring parenting style groups there are in the data based on the three parenting style dimensions. Moreover, use of cluster analysis made it possible to avoid arbitrary cut-offs of parenting style dimensions, which cut-offs are typical, for example, when using the traditional median split method.

In the previous literature, mothers have been found to be more authoritative in their parenting than fathers, and fathers more authoritarian than mothers (McKinney & Renk, 2008; Simons & Conger, 2007; Smetana & Ahmad, 2018). These gender differences have been reported among Finnish parents as well (Aunola et al., 1999; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen,

2003). There are also studies showing that mothers are generally warmer toward their children than fathers are (Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins, 2009; Nelson et al., 2011) but, on the other hand, apply more psychological control in their parenting than fathers do (Barber & Xia, 2013; Lansford et al., 2014). Most of the findings reporting gender differences in **parenting styles** are, however, quite old. As cultural changes affect not only directly on parenting beliefs and attitudes, but also indirectly through, for example, culturally regulated customs of childrearing being evident, for example, in the roles of fathers and mothers in childcare (Harkness & Super, 2002), cultural changes may have affected also on gender differences in parenting. Consequently, in the present study, we also examined whether there are differences in the proportions of different parenting style groups between mothers and fathers. In one previous study focusing on parenting style groups among Finnish mothers and fathers ($n = 174$) in the '90 s (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2003), the most common parenting style group identified among mothers was authoritative parenting group (28% of mothers showing this parenting style), while among fathers this parenting style group was the least common (only 5% of fathers being in this group). In turn, among fathers, the most common identified parenting style group was authoritarian parenting group (36% of fathers showing this parenting style), which was the least common parenting style group among mothers (only 7% of mothers being in this group). As fathers in modern societies spend more time on childcare and with their children than in previous decades and the roles of parenthood have been changing (for a review, see Henz, 2019), it is possible that the parenting styles of fathers and mothers have become more similar than before and, thus, the gender differences may not be as obvious as in the '90 s.

Parental Burnout

Parental burnout refers to a syndrome caused by a chronic imbalance of parental demands over personal resources (Mikolajczak et al., 2018). In the literature, parental burnout has been characterized by four key symptoms (Mikolajczak et al., 2019; Roskam et al., 2018; Van Bakel et al., 2018): emotional exhaustion in one's parental role (i.e., feeling emotionally drained by the demands of the parental role); emotional distancing from one's child/children (i.e., the parent is less and less emotionally present, which is reflected in a lower sensitivity and responsiveness); contrasting one's current parental self with the previous parental self (i.e., the experience that one is no longer as good a parent as before); and feelings of being fed up with one's parental role (i.e., the experience that one can no longer tolerate their role as a parent and no longer enjoys being with their child).

Parental burnout has been shown to be a distinct syndrome from depression and job burnout, although significant relations have been found between these conditions (Mikolajczak et al., 2020). For example, unlike depression, parental burnout involves challenges related precisely to the context of parenthood; that is, whereas depression is reflected in all areas of life, parental burnout manifests only in parenting. As with depression, parental burnout has been shown to have many serious consequences, such as suicidality, sleeping problems, and relationship disputes (Mikolajczak et al., 2020). However, unlike depression or job burnout, parental burnout represents a very specific risk factor for children, as it has been strongly associated with child neglect and child abuse (Mikolajczak et al., 2020).

Recent research shows that parental burnout is a challenge experienced not only by mothers but also by fathers (Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020). For example, in a Belgian study, the incidence of maternal and paternal burnout was found to be equally likely if the father was invested in his fatherhood, as evidenced, for example, by his interest in work-family balance (Roskam et al., 2017). There is, however, some research evidence showing that symptoms of parental burnout are more typical for mothers than for fathers (Roskam et al., 2021; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020).

The Associations of Parental Burnout and Parenting Styles

According to the Belsky's (1984) process model, parenting is influenced by the characteristics of the parent and the child as well as the social environment. The model presents the psychological well-being of the parent as one of the most important factors influencing parenting. More specifically, the model suggests that when two of the three determinants of parenting (determinants including child characteristics, characteristics of social environment, and the psychological resources of the parent) are at risk, parental sensitive involvement is most protected when personal psychological resources of the parent are still functioning. According to the model, the stress created by the environment, as well as the support it provides, affect the mental well-being of the parent and, thus, their parenting. As parental burnout has been suggested to develop when the demands of parenting are too high in relation to parenting resources (*The balance between risks and resources* (BR²) model; Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018), parental burnout can be seen to reflect the poor psychological well-being of the parent, which, according to Belsky's model, directly impacts parenting. On the other hand, dysfunctional parenting and its related practices may also make the parent prone to parental burnout, as they increase the stress experienced in parenting (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018).

Thus far, little research has been carried out on the relationship between parental burnout and specific styles of parenting. However, burned-out parents have been shown to be emotionally distant from their children (e.g., Roskam et al., 2017, 2018) and vulnerable to adopting harsh and punitive parenting behaviors (Mikolajczak et al., 2018), as well as resorting to child neglect and violence (Mikolajczak et al., 2018, 2019). These results suggest that burned-out parents might be more prone to adopting authoritarian or uninvolved parenting styles than parents without symptoms of parental burnout. As parental burnout reflects chronic parental stress (Roskam et al., 2017), additional support for this suggestion comes from parental stress literature, which has demonstrated a positive link between parenting stress and authoritarian parenting style (for a review, see Fonseca et al., 2020).

Following Belsky's model, previous studies have found that a parent's well-being influences the parenting style they adopt. For example, studies have found an association between depression and psychological control, with the use of psychological control being typical especially in depressed parents (Aunola et al., 2015; Cummings & Davies, 1994; Laukkanen et al., 2014). The negative emotions experienced by the parent on a daily basis have also been linked to psychological control (Aunola et al., 2017). In general, depressed parents have been found to be less sensitive to the child's needs than parents without depression (for a review, see Lovejoy et al., 2000). In addition to psychological control, poor parental well-being has been associated with a lower level of warmth (Laukkanen et al., 2014). Studies have also found a link between low maternal stress (for a review, see Fonseca et al., 2020) and high self-esteem (Aunola et al., 1999) to warmth and authoritative parenting. The above research results support Belsky's (1984) theoretical argumentation that only a parent who experiences a general sense of well-being is able to act consistently in a caring and supportive role.

Overall, parental well-being and parenting are inter-related. So far, however, parental well-being has been viewed mainly from the perspective of depressive symptoms (Aunola et al., 2015; Cummings & Davies, 1994; Lovejoy et al., 2000). In addition, the previous research can be considered quite old, as most of the studies were published in the 1990s. Also, the studies focused mainly on mothers, while less is known about the relationship of well-being and parenting among fathers. Consequently, in the present study, we examined the associations of different parenting style groups with parental burnout and to what extent the possible associations are different for mothers and fathers.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study was to extend the previous research to the following research questions:

- (1) What kind of parenting style groups can be found among Finnish parents, defined by warmth, behavioral control, and psychological control, and how common are the different parenting style groups among the parents?
- (2) Are there differences in the proportions of different parenting style groups between mothers and fathers?
- (3) Do parents displaying different parenting styles differ from each other in terms of parental burnout?
- (4) Are the relations between parenting styles and parental burnout different for mothers and fathers?

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study were 1,471 Finnish parents (91% mothers) who had at least one 2-year-old or older child living with them (either permanently or part-time) in the same household during the data collection in the spring of 2018. The age of the parents ranged from 23–61 ($M=37$, $SD=6.21$). A total of 76.3% of parents lived in a nuclear family, which also was the most usual (58%) family type with children in Finland in 2018 (OSF, 2019). The number of biological children ranged from 1–17 ($M=2.31$, $SD=1.22$). In 2018, the average number of children in Finnish families was 1.85 (OSF, 2019). In the present study, the youngest child in the family was, on average, a 4-year-old ($SD=4.10$) and the eldest was an 8-year-old ($SD=4.91$). A total of 99.7% of the parents were native Finnish, 98.4% lived in Finland and 23 lived abroad, and 77.8% were employed. The background information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Procedure

The data were collected as a part of a broader research project during spring 2018. Before collecting the data, ethical permission for the study was obtained from the ethical committee of the relevant university. All the participants provided informed consent to confirm their voluntary participation in the study. The data was collected without identification and the participants were informed that the data would remain anonymous. The parents completed either a pen-and-paper questionnaire at child health centers located

Table 1 Participants' Background Information ($n = 1,471$)

	Participants	%
Age (M , SD in brackets)	37 (6.21)	
Gender (n)		
Female	1,341	91.2
Male	130	8.8
Family type (n)		
Nuclear family	1,120	76.3
Single-parent household	141	9.6
Blended family	162	11.0
Rainbow family	7	0.5
Multiple generation family	5	0.3
Other	33	2.2
Number of children		
Biological (M , SD in brackets)	2.31 (1.22)	
Living permanently at home (M , SD in brackets)	2.21 (1.22)	
Living part-time at home (M , SD in brackets)	2.01 (1.20)	
The age of the youngest child living at home (M , SD in brackets)	4.48 (4.01)	
The age of the eldest child living at home (M , SD in brackets)	8.40 (4.91)	
Employed (n)		
Yes	1,144	77.8
No	325	22.1

in three Finnish cities or at congregational family playgroups located in one Finnish city (13.4%) or an online questionnaire collected on Webropol and advertised through different news sites and social media channels (86.6%) across Finland. The child health centers were selected based on geographical representativeness (the cities represented Southern, Middle, and Northern Finland) and were considered appropriate locations for reaching a heterogeneous sample of parents (e.g., including different family types from different socioeconomic classes), as all Finnish parents are required to take their 0–6-year-old-children for annual check-ups at these centers. Because of the small number of participating fathers, two family playgroups were included that had specific playgroups for fathers and children. Online questionnaires were selected based to their ability to reach a large number of parents from different areas of Finland.

In all three data collection scenarios, the parents were provided identical information about the study and their participation on the first page of the questionnaire. At the child health centers, the nurses were instructed to give the questionnaires to the parents at the end of their child's annual check-up. The nurses asked the parents to read the instructions and to complete the questionnaire in the waiting room and then drop it anonymously into a post box marked with the project's name. Alternatively, the parents were given the option to take the questionnaire home and send it back to the researchers anonymously in a pre-paid envelope. In the family playgroups, the instructors of the playgroups gave the questionnaires to the parents when the playgroups ended and

asked them to read the instructions, complete the questionnaire, and return it to the researchers anonymously in a pre-paid envelope. In the case of online questionnaire, parents could participate by clicking the given Webropol-link advertised through different news sites and social media channels. The answers provided in Webropol were transmitted into IBM SPSS Statistical program (version 24).

Measures

Parenting Styles Parenting styles were measured with a shortened Finnish version (Aunola & Nurmi, 2004) of the Block Child Rearing Practices Report (CRPR; Roberts et al., 1984). The parents were asked to rate 13 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not like me at all* to 5 = *very much like me*). These items were intended to measure different aspects of parenting styles: warmth (5 items; e.g., *I express my affection by hugging and holding my child*), behavioral control (4 items; e.g., *My child should learn how to behave properly toward his/her parents*), and psychological control (4 items; e.g., *I let my child see how disappointed and ashamed I feel when he/she misbehaves*). The parenting style questionnaire demonstrated adequate internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha reliabilities of 0.69, 0.69, and 0.73 for the three subscales, respectively.

Parental Burnout Parental burnout was measured with a Finnish version (Aunola et al., 2020) of the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA; Roskam et al., 2018). The parents were

asked to rate 23 items on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = *never* to 6 = *daily*). These items were intended to measure different aspects of parental burnout: exhaustion in one's parental role (9 items; e.g., *I feel completely run down in my role as a parent*), contrast with the previous parental self (6 items; e.g., *I don't think I'm the good father/mother that I used to be to my children*), feelings of being fed up as a parent (5 items; e.g., *I can't stand my role as father/mother anymore*), and emotional distancing from one's children (3 items; e.g., *I do what I'm supposed to do for my children but nothing more*). The PBA questionnaire demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.97 for the total score in the present sample. The Finnish version of the PBA has been shown to demonstrate good psychometric properties (Aunola et al., 2020).

Analysis Strategy

All answers were entered either electronically (web-based questionnaires) or manually (paper questionnaires) into the IBM SPSS statistical software program (version 24). The analyses were conducted using the following steps: First, the parenting style groups and their prevalence in the data were examined with k-means cluster analysis using the standardized mean scores of the three parenting style dimensions as the criteria variables. Second, the differences between the found parenting style groups regarding the criteria variables were examined with one-way ANOVA. Third, gender differences in the proportions of parenting style groups were examined using cross-tabulation. Fourth, the associations between parenting style groups and parental burnout were examined by means of one-way ANOVA. Because the data did not meet the homogeneity of variances assumption, the Games Howell post hoc test was applied. Fifth, the interaction between gender and parenting style groups on parental burnout was examined using two-way ANOVA, in which both parenting style group membership and gender were added as independent variables. Because of the large sample size, only the results with p -values less than 0.01 were interpreted as significant.

Results

Finnish Parents' Parenting Style Groups

In order to identify homogeneous groups of parents according to their parenting styles, a clustering procedure was carried out for standardized parenting style variables by executing the same process for two to eight clusters solutions. Different solutions were compared in terms of cluster sample sizes and interpretability of the solution. On the basis of this procedure, we ended up with a six-cluster solution. The

identified parenting style groups were authoritarian ($n = 198$, 13.5%), permissive ($n = 224$, 15.2%), psychologically controlling ($n = 285$, 19.4%), uninvolved ($n = 212$, 14.4%), controlling ($n = 183$, 12.4%), and authoritative ($n = 369$, 25.1%). The six parenting style groups differed statistically significantly in terms of each parenting style variable ($p < 0.001$), and each group showed an adequate (over 10%) representation of the sample. All the groups were interpretable in terms of their characteristics: four of the identified parenting styles (i.e., authoritarian, permissive, uninvolved, and authoritative) were similar to those described in the previous research literature. The two other parenting styles could be interpreted and labeled in terms of their characteristics. Also, they were clearly different in their characteristics from the other four groups. The cluster solution is presented in Fig. 1.

Parents in the authoritarian parenting style group reported the lowest level of warmth and an above average level of both behavioral and psychological control (see Fig. 1). Parents in the permissive parenting style group were characterized by the lowest level of both behavioral and psychological control and an above average level of warmth. Parents in the psychologically controlling parenting style group reported an average level of warmth and behavioral control but an above average level of psychological control. Parents in the uninvolved parenting style group were typified by a low level of each of the three parenting style dimensions. Parents in the controlling parenting style group were characterized by a high level of both behavioral and psychological control and an average level of warmth. Parents in the authoritative parenting style group were typified by a high level of warmth and an above average level of behavioral control but a clearly less, only an average, level of psychological control.

The group means and standard deviations for the parenting style variables and the differences between parenting style groups in the criteria variables tested with ANOVA are presented in Table 2. The groups of authoritarian, permissive, uninvolved, and authoritative parenting styles differed statistically significantly from each other in the level of warmth (Table 2). Regarding the level of behavioral control, the permissive, psychologically controlling, uninvolved, and controlling parenting style groups differed statistically significantly from each other. In terms of psychological control, all parenting style groups differed statistically significantly from each other, except for the authoritarian and psychologically controlling parenting style groups.

The Differences in Parenting Style Groups Between Mothers and Fathers

The results of the cross-tabulation revealed that mothers and fathers were equally divided into the six parenting style groups, that is, the association of gender and parenting style group was not statistically significant (*Cramer's*

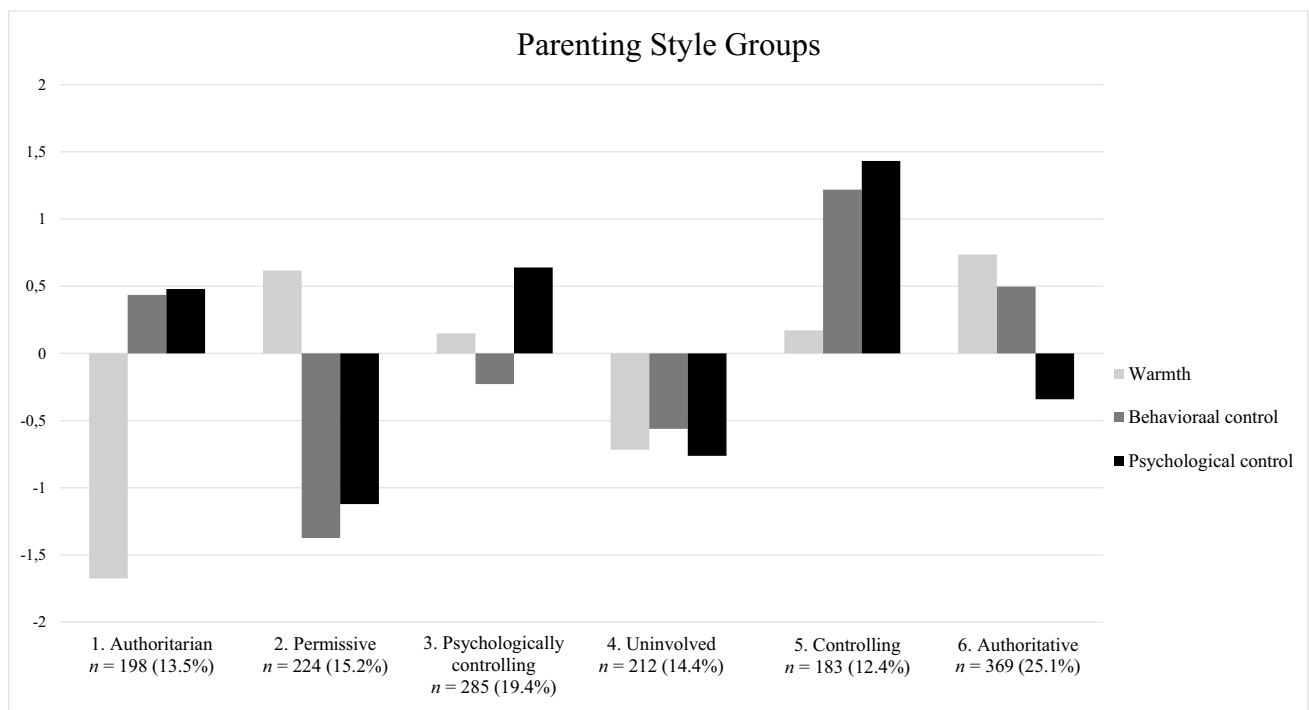


Fig. 1 Parenting style groups created with values of standardized parenting style variables (k-means cluster analysis)

Table 2 Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SDs) of the Three Parenting Style Variables and the Statistical Differences Between Parenting Style Groups in These (ANOVA)

		Parenting Style Group						
		Authoritarian	Permissive	Psychologically controlling	Uninvolved	Controlling	Authoritative	F
Warmth	M	3.60 ^a	4.67 ^b	4.45 ^c	4.03 ^d	4.46 ^e	4.73 ^b	554.29***
	SD	0.35	0.25	0.27	0.28	0.36	0.22	
Behavioral control	M	4.01 ^a	2.88 ^b	3.60 ^c	3.39 ^d	4.50 ^e	4.05 ^a	468.85***
	SD	0.43	0.47	0.32	0.44	0.34	0.35	
Psychological control	M	2.89 ^a	1.74 ^b	3.00 ^a	2.00 ^d	3.57 ^e	2.30 ^f	595.46***
	SD	0.49	0.44	0.35	0.36	0.50	0.37	

The upper indexes denote statistical differences ($p < .01$) between the parenting style groups. The groups with the different upper index differ from each other statistically significantly

*** $p < .001$

$V = 0.086, p > 0.05$). The authoritarian parenting style group included 20.8% of fathers and 12.8% of mothers; the permissive parenting style group had 14.6% of fathers and 15.3% of mothers; the psychologically controlling parenting style consisted of 14.6% of fathers and 19.8% of mothers; the uninvolved parenting style group included 18.5% of fathers and 14% of mothers; the controlling parenting style group had 12.3% of fathers and 12.5% of mothers, and the authoritative parenting style group included 19.2% of fathers and 25.7% of mothers.

Associations of Parenting Style Groups With Parental Burnout

The analysis of variance showed that parents demonstrating different parenting styles differed from each other in terms of parental burnout (see Table 3). Parents with an authoritarian parenting style experienced statistically significantly higher level of parental burnout than the other parents did. Moreover, parents with uninvolved and controlling parenting styles reported a higher level of parental burnout than those

Table 3 The Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD; in parentheses) of Parental Burnout in Parenting Style Groups and Group Differences (ANOVA)

	Parental burnout <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
1. Authoritarian <i>n</i> = 198 (13.5%)	2.03 (1.44)
2. Permissive <i>n</i> = 224 (15.2%)	1.10 (0.96)
3. Psychologically controlling <i>n</i> = 285 (19.4%)	1.30 (1.10)
4. Uninvolved <i>n</i> = 212 (14.4%)	1.53 (1.20)
5. Controlling <i>n</i> = 183 (12.4%)	1.60 (1.32)
6. Authoritative <i>n</i> = 369 (25.1%)	1.20 (1.02)
<i>F</i> (5, 1,465)	18.97***
η_p^2	.061
Pairwise comparison. ¹	1 > 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; 4, 5 > 2, 6

*** $p < .001$ ¹ Games-Howell as post hoc test ($p < .01$)

with a permissive or authoritative parenting style. When interpreting the results, it should be noted that, on average, the mean scores of parental burnout were relatively low in all parenting style groups (see Table 3).

Two-way analysis of variance showed that the interaction term “Parenting style group X Gender” was not statistically significant for parental burnout ($F(5, 1,459) = 0.78, p > 0.05, \eta_p^2 = 0.003$), suggesting that the associations of parenting style groups with parental burnout were not dependent on the parent’s gender. However, in addition to the main effect of the parenting style group on parental burnout ($F(5, 1,465) = 18.97, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.061$), gender had a statistically significant main effect ($F(1, 1,459) = 13.10, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.009$). Mothers reported higher levels of parental burnout ($M = 1.44, SD = 1.20$) than fathers did ($M = 1.11, SD = 1.05$).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to find out what kind of parenting style groups occur among today’s Finnish parents and, moreover, how these parenting style groups are associated with the level of parental burnout. In addition, the study examined whether there are differences between mothers and fathers in parenting style groups and in the associations between parenting style groups and parental burnout. Six different parenting style groups were identified: authoritarian (13.5%), permissive (15.2%), psychologically controlling

(19.4%), uninvolved (14.4%), controlling (12.4%), and authoritative (25.1%). Of the found parenting style groups, the authoritative style (high level of warmth and behavioral control and an average level of psychological control) was the most common, with a quarter of the parents deploying this parenting style. On the other hand, controlling (an average level of warmth and high levels of both forms of control) and authoritarian (a low level of warmth and high levels of both forms of control) parenting styles were the least common. Parents deploying different parenting styles were further found to show different levels of parental burnout, with authoritarian parents reporting the highest level of parental burnout. The associations between parenting style groups and parental burnout were similar in mothers and fathers.

Of the parenting style groups found, four were consistent with the parenting styles identified in the previous research literature (Baumrind, 2013; Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019; Maccoby & Martin, 1983): the authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved parenting styles. In addition to these traditional parenting styles, two other styles of parenting, labeled controlling (an average level of warmth and a remarkably high level of both forms of control) and psychologically controlling (an average level of warmth and behavioral control, and an above average level of psychological control) were identified among the Finnish parents. The discovery of these two parenting style groups in the current data may be due to the fact that parenting styles were measured not only by warmth and behavioral control but also by psychological control. In previous studies, psychological control was rarely considered when investigating parenting styles from a typological perspective (as exceptions, see Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019; Smetana & Ahmad, 2018). Overall, the results suggest that today’s Finnish parents are not a homogeneous group of parents applying a certain kind of parenting style but rather have different ways of interacting with their children. This conclusion is further supported by the finding demonstrating that the different parenting styles are distributed relatively evenly among parents, with the authoritative parenting style being only slightly more emphasized. Interestingly, in the present study the proportion of authoritative parenting style was slightly higher (25.1%) than in the study carried out among Finnish parents in the ‘90s (17.2% when considering the whole sample) (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2003), whereas the proportion of authoritarian parenting style was lower (13.5% and 20.1%, respectively). Although the two studies are not directly comparable due to differences in the assessed parenting dimensions and sample sizes, based on rough impression authoritative parenting might be slightly more common among contemporary Finnish parents than it was about 30 years ago, whereas authoritarian parenting might be less common (see also, Dupont et al., 2022).

The results showed further that there were no differences in the proportions of parenting style groups between mothers

and fathers; that is, Finnish mothers and fathers seem to use equally the same parenting styles. In the previous literature, some studies have found that the authoritative style is more common among mothers than among fathers, whereas the authoritarian style is more common among fathers (Aunola et al., 1999; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2003; Simons & Conger, 2007; Smetana & Ahmad, 2018), but there are also studies that have not found these kinds of gender differences (Milevsky et al., 2007). The results of the present study bring a new perspective to the topic by showing that the parenting styles of today's Finnish mothers and fathers are rather more alike than different, the results being similar to those found by Milevsky et al. (2007) among parents in United States. When comparing the present study with previous studies, it is worth noting that the most of those studies reporting gender differences are well over 10 years old. The results of the present study may therefore be due to the fact that mothers' and fathers' attitudes toward parenting, and, in turn, their behavior toward their children, have become more similar across time (see, e.g., Henz, 2019). In addition, Finland is among the most gender equal countries in the world, which may also contribute to the unified way contemporary mothers and fathers interact with their children.

The results concerning the associations of parenting style groups with parental burnout showed that authoritarian parents reported higher level of parental burnout than parents using other parenting styles. Moreover, uninvolved and controlling parents reported higher level of parental burnout than permissive and authoritative parents did. The authoritarian and controlling parents who reported the highest level of parental burnout shared a common level of control in their parenting (i.e., an average or high levels of both behavioral and psychological control). From this viewpoint, the finding is in line with the previous research in which parental low psychological well-being (in terms of depressive symptoms and negative emotions) has been found to be associated with a high level of psychological control (Aunola et al., 2015, 2017; Cummings & Davies, 1994). The result is also in line with the findings associating parental burnout with the parental need for control (Lindström et al., 2011) and harsh and punitive parenting behaviors (Mikolajczak et al., 2018, 2019). It should be noted, however, that although in the present study authoritarian and controlling parents reported higher level of parental burnout than other parents did, the mean scores of parental burnout among them were still relatively low and, thus, did not reflect clinically significant levels of burnout.

The results of the present study suggest further, however, that a high level of psychological control does not in itself explain the associations between parenting styles and parental burnout: parents characterized by a psychologically controlling parenting style did not report as high

a level of parental burnout as other parents with an average or above average level of psychological control in their parenting style. Moreover, uninvolved parents with a low level of psychological control in their parenting reported the third highest level of parental burnout. Consequently, the amount of parental warmth also seems to matter in the found association. In the previous literature, lack of warmth in parenting has been related to depressive symptoms (Laukanen et al., 2014) and parenting stress (for a review, see Fonseca et al., 2020). Moreover, one of the main symptoms of parental burnout is the emotional distancing from the child (Roskam et al., 2018), which can be reflected precisely as a parent's low warmth toward their child. In the present study, permissive and authoritative parents were the least likely to report symptoms of parental burnout. This may indicate that parental warmth, in particular, may protect the parent from parental burnout by contributing to generally well-functioning parenting and, by this way, decrease the stress experienced in parenting (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018). On the other hand, it is also possible, as suggested by Belsky's (1984) process model, that the psychological resources of a parent impact the parental functioning rather than vice versa. More specifically, the parent experiencing psychological well-being (i.e., reporting low level of parental burnout) may be able to show positive emotions in the parent–child relationship and apply more adaptive parenting styles in terms of warmth.

The associations of parenting styles with parental burnout were found to be similar for mothers and fathers, although the scores for parental burnout were on average higher in mothers than in fathers. The fact that parenting styles are associated with parental burnout in the same way for mothers and fathers suggests, on the one hand, that parental well-being may be reflected in a parent's way of interacting with their child regardless of the parent's gender, as suggested by Belsky's (1984) process model. On the other hand, the result may also indicate that dysfunctional parenting styles are risk factors for parental burnout (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018) for both mothers and fathers. Although some previous studies (see, e.g., Aunola et al., 2015, 2017) have examined both mothers and fathers, many previous studies on well-being and parenting have examined only mothers (see, e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1994; Lovejoy et al., 2000). Therefore, the results of the present study are an important step in increasing our understanding of not only maternal but also paternal well-being and parenting.

The limitations of this study must be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, although the sample size of the study was large, the proportion of fathers in the data was significantly lower than that of mothers. Because the sample of fathers was less representative than that of mothers, the results regarding gender differences in parenting styles and their association to parental burnout should

be interpreted with some caution. Second, highly educated parents and parents living in nuclear families were over-represented in the sample. To find out the extent to which the results of the present study are generalizable to lower-educated parents, and to parents living in other family forms than in nuclear family, further studies are needed. Third, the present study was cross-sectional and, consequently, no conclusions concerning the causal relationships between parenting styles and parental burnout can be drawn. For example, although it is possible that parental burnout puts parents at risk to adopt an authoritarian parenting style when interacting with their children, it is also possible that it is the authoritarian parenting style that increases the risk of parental burnout rather than vice versa. As authoritarianism or negative aspects of parenting have been shown to be less stable characteristics than authoritativeness or positive aspects of parenting (Rimehaug et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2017), the developmental dynamics between parental burnout and authoritarian parenting, in particular, deserves attention in further research. Also, a further option is that a third variable, such as the lack of resources to handle demanding life situations or demanding child characteristics, explains the found association between parental burnout and parenting styles. Therefore, future studies are needed to gain a deeper understanding not only of the developmental dynamic between parenting styles and parental burnout but also of the factors involved in this association. Especially since Belsky's process model suggests that parental well-being, child characteristics, and social context (including not only cultural and historical context but also, for example, external resources and social networks) all interact in parenting, studies including these different factors would provide possibilities to get more comprehensive picture about the phenomenon. Fourth, parental self-assessments were used as measurements in the study. When a parent evaluates their own activities with their child as well as their own experience as a parent, the responses can distort the image of both parenting style and parental burnout. Finally, as the population examined in the present study was homogeneous, future studies are needed on the parenting style groups, and the associations of these groups with parental burnout, in more heterogeneous and culturally diverse populations. The cultural beliefs, norms, and values in society are reflected in parental socialization goals and guide the social judgments of specific parenting behaviors (Chen et al., 2019; see also, Bornstein, 2012). As it is plausible that cultural diversity is reflected on the diversity of parenting style groups as well, the parenting style groups and their proportions found in the present study might be different in more diverse cultural contexts.

Overall, the present study provided new information about parenting style groups among Finnish parents and the associations of the parenting styles to parental burnout. Of the six parenting style groups identified, parents with authoritarian parenting experienced the highest level of parental burnout, whereas parents with permissive or authoritative parenting reported the least parental burnout. Mothers and fathers were found to deploy the same parenting styles equally, and the associations of different parenting style groups with parental burnout were similar regardless of gender. The findings suggest that in child health care and family centers, particular attention should be paid to risk groups, for example, those parents who seem to be characterized by an authoritarian parenting style or those reporting symptoms of parental burnout. It would be important to include fathers also in the counseling sessions or regular visits to the child health care center, since fathers seem to be similarly to mothers at risk for parental burnout when their parenting style is accompanied with a high level of control and low warmth.

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Data Availability Statements The dataset analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethical Approval Approval was obtained from the ethics committee of University of Jyväskylä, Finland. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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