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The Change in Parenting Style over a Period of Two Decades

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ABSTRACT

Background: Child-rearing practices have a significant influence on behavioral development across the lifespan, affecting childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Aims and Objectives: To understand pattern in parenting knowledge about child rearing over two decades.

Material and Method: This study utilized a repeated cross-sectional survey design across three independent cohorts of parents in 2001 (n=194), 2011 (n=245), and 2024 (n=330) within the same primary school setting. Data were collected using a validated 25-item Gujarati child-rearing questionnaire from parents of children studying in grade 1 to 4 in a primary school.

Analysis: Categorical demographic variables and item-level responses were analyzed using Pearson's Chi-Square (χ^2) tests with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons ($\alpha = 0.002$). Overall knowledge scores were analyzed using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test.

Results: Continuous parenting attitude scores did not differ significantly between 2001 (M = 18.38, SD = 3.02) and 2011 (M = 18.47, SD = 2.98; p = .92). However, total scores in 2024 (M = 17.78, SD = 3.08) were significantly lower than in 2001 (p = .041) and 2011 (p = .011). Over two decades, significant positive shifts occurred regarding peer comparison avoidance and maternal-paternal shared discipline roles. Conversely, negative shifts were observed in parental consistency, overprotection, and restricting adolescent autonomy.

Implication: Parental attitudes showed domain-specific shifts over two decades. While gender-role stereotypes and peer comparisons decreased, overprotection and strict disciplinary attitudes increased. Structured parenting education interventions are recommended to foster positive, evidence-based child-rearing practices.

Keywords: Child Rearing, Parenting, Change in Trend, India

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INTRODUCTION

Child rearing practices play a major role in child mental health. When parents are aware about proper parenting style, it will be a major preventive step for those child psychiatric disorders in which maladaptive rearing practices play most important role (i.e. oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, etc). It becomes important to know about rearing practices of parents and find deviation in them. On basis of which we may predict high risk children having behavioral problems secondary to parenting issues and can try to prevent it. Different areas of parenting like, discipline, physical punishment, comparison, verbal abuse are important aspects to know as it can also affect academic performance.

Several studies have concluded that harsh discipline and physical abuse are not uncommon.

In a study of seven countries including India, Runyan et al. [1] found that almost all parents used nonviolent discipline and verbal or psychological punishment. Physical punishment was used in at least 55% of the families. Spanking rates (with open hand on buttocks) ranging from minimum 15% in an educated community in India to maximum of 76% in a Philippine community. Physical and verbal punishments of children were common in high, middle, and low income communities around the world. The forms and rates of punishment vary among countries and among communities within countries. In Kerala, 62% of the mothers reported using severe verbal discipline and 50% of mothers reported using severe physical abuse. Results suggest a high prevalence of normative and abusive practices in the community, mothers playing a prime role in disciplining the child reported by Nair et al. [2].

Hunter et al. [3] study in rural India concluded that nearly half of the mothers reported using severe verbal discipline and 42% reported using severe physical discipline. While common and severe discipline practices were less frequent than moderate practices and had association with risk factors like low maternal education and spousal violence. [3]. Burnette [4] mentions that harsh parenting exert a strong influence on risk for antisocial behavior apart from other factors. Oza [5] found differences in child rearing practices as per the religion. Culture also plays important role - Asians value conformity more and self-direction less than the British, and that this difference was considerably more pronounced in the older than in the younger generation as in study by Stopes-Roe et al. [6].

Brown and Iyengar [7] in a study of student achievement and parental style found behavioral control and psychological control to be two inherent features of parental style that have a direct effect on student achievement. Adolescents' perceived level of independence when interacting with their parents also seemed to have a direct relationship on their academic achievement.

While short-term parenting studies exist, limited empirical evidence tracks longitudinal changes in parental knowledge and attitudes across a multi-decade span within the same community setting in India. To address this gap, we examined changes in parental views on child rearing across three cohorts spanning 23 years (2001, 2011, and 2024).

Aims and Objectives

To evaluate long-term shifts in overall parental child-rearing knowledge scores across 2001, 2011, and 2024 cohorts.

To identify domain-specific changes in parental views across 25 item-wise parenting constructs.

To assess demographic shifts (family type, maternal education, occupation, and family size) over the two-decade period.

Material and Method

This study utilized a repeated cross-sectional survey design across three independent cohorts of parents in 2001, 2011, and 2024 within the same primary school setting. Data of 2001 and 2011 were already with us. We again wish to know knowledge of parents of children in same school in 2024. For the same we took Ethical committee approval in 2024. (No. APP 2024/18 dated 24/7/24). Principal of same renowned local language primary school was approached and the questionnaires were distributed among children in standard 1st to 4th grades in the identical division in which questionnaire were given in 2001 and 2011, to get it filled by parent from home along with inform consent form regarding participation in study. After two days the consent and responses were collected.

Study Instrument

The 25-item Gujarati questionnaire was developed based on theoretical constructs of child development and parenting

practices. Content validity was established through expert review by senior psychiatrists. Construct scoring ('correct' *vs.* 'incorrect/neutral') was assigned based on clinical consensus and literature regarding adaptive vs. maladaptive parenting practices. The correct answer for the statement scored one (1) and incorrect, neutral or no answer was assigned score zero (0). The total score of responses has range of 0 to 25.

The 25 statements focused on different areas of parenting like: Love and affection (statement 1,7); discipline (statement 2,3,4,5,6,8,9,11,15, 25); quality time (statement 12); helping child in troublesome situation (statement 13,20); respectful behavior (statement 14,17); parental marital life (statement 16,18); comparison (statement 23); promoting independence (statement 10,19,21,23) and Reality orientation (statement 24).

The statements were kept in random orders, i.e. Questions related to discipline area were not grouped together.

Analysis

Categorical demographic variables and item-level responses across the three survey years (2001, 2011, and 2024) were analysed using Pearson's Chi-Square ($\chi 2$) tests of independence with accurate degrees of freedom (df = (r-1) (c-1)). To control for inflation of Type I error rates across 25 statement-wise comparisons, a Bonferroni correction was applied (significance threshold set at $\alpha = 0.002$). Continuous overall knowledge scores across time points were analysed using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Assumption tests (homogeneity of variance and normality) were verified, and Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test was performed to identify specific pair-wise differences between survey years.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	2001 (n=194)	2011 (n=245)	2024 (n=330)	P value
Sex				$\chi 2 = 11.48$,
Male Female	130 (67.01%)	135 (55.10%)	172 (52.12%)	df = 2,
	64 (32.98%)	110 (44.89%)	158 (47.87%)	p = 0.003
Family type				$\chi 2 = 1.32$,
Joint	124 (63.91%)	169 (68.97%)	223 (67.57%)	df = 2,
Nuclear	70 (36.08%)	76 (31.02%)	107 (32.42%)	p = 0.518
Number of children				$\chi 2 = 41.91$,
Only child Two sibs	72 (37.11%)	92 (37.55%)	201 (60.9%)	df = 2,
	122 (62.88%)	153 (62.44%)	129 (39.09%)	p < 0.001*
Education of mother				$\chi 2 = 110.42$,
Upto 12th Graduate	37 (19.07%)	96 (39.18%)	182 (55.15%)	df = 4,
Post Graduate	129 (66.49%)	131 (53.46%)	81 (24.54%)	p < 0.001*
	28 (14.43%)	18 (7.34%)	67 (20.3%)	
Mother's occupation				$\chi 2 = 0.7757$.
Job	34 (17.52%)	41 (16.73%)	62 (18.78%)	df=1,
House wife	160 (82.47%)	204 (83.26%)	268 (81.21%)	*p*=0.678

Table 1 shows demographic details regarding sex, family type, number of children in the family, mothers' educational status as well as mother's occupation.

The demographic breakdown of respondents across the three survey years revealed significant variations in the number of children, child sex distribution, and maternal education levels. Specifically, the proportion of only children increased substantially from 37.1% in 2001 to 60.9% in 2024, while maternal educational attainment shifted significantly, with mothers holding education up to the 12th standard increasing from 19.1% to 55.2% over the same period. However, family type and maternal employment status remained statistically comparable across the cohorts.

Table 2. Sample Composition by Student Grade and Mean Scores

	2001 (N=194)	2011 (N=245)	2024 (N=330)
1st standard	45 (23.19%)	54 (22.04%)	173 (52.42%)
2nd standard	42 (21.64%)	64 (26.12%)	54 (16.36%)
3rd standard	59 (30.41%)	65 (26.53%)	46 (13.93%)
4th standard	48 (24.74%)	62 (25.30%)	57 (17.27%)
Total responses (N)	194	245	330
Sum of total scores of parents	3565	4525	5867
Mean score	18.38 (± 3.02)	18.47 (± 2.98)	17.78 (± 3.08)

The distribution of student grades across the survey cohorts showed an increased representation of 1st-standard participants in 2024 (52.4%) compared to previous years. Cumulative total scores for the sample reached 3,565 in 2001, 4,525 in 2011, and 5,867 in 2024, reflecting the larger overall sample size in the final cohort. Mean parenting knowledge scores remained steady between 2001 and 2011 (18.38 and 18.47, respectively) before showing a modest decrease in 2024 (17.78).

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA of Total Knowledge Scores Across Survey Years

Source of Variation	*Sum of Square*	*Degree of freedom*	*Mean Square*	*F-statestics*	*P-value*
Between Groups	80.3994	2	40.20	4.374	0.013*
Within Groups	7039.40	766	9.19		
Total	7119.80	768			

"One-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in mean parenting knowledge scores across the three years [F(2, 766) = 4.37, p = 0.013]. Post-hoc Tukey HSD analysis indicated that total parenting attitude scores did not differ significantly between 2001 (M = 18.38, SD = 3.02) and 2011 (M = 18.47, SD = 2.98; p = 0.92). However, total scores in 2024 (M = 17.78, SD = 3.08) were significantly lower than in both 2001 (p = 0.041) and 2011 (p = 0.011)."

Table 4. Statements wise Comparison of Parental Views Across three cohorts (2001, 2011, 2024) (Bonferroni α = 0.002)

	Comparison of Parental Views regarding Child Rearing in 2001 and 2011					
	Statement	**Correct Response**	**Correct responses in 2001 N (%)**	**Correct responses in 2011 N (%)**	**Correct responses in 2024 N (%)**	**Chi Square (x^2, df=2, p)**
	Love and affection					
1	Parental love should be unconditional	Yes	181(93.3)	233(95.1)	310(93.93)	x^2=0.66 p=0.719
7.	Child should know how loving parents are.	Yes	164(84.5)	217(88.6)	276(83.63)	=2.92 p=0.232
	Discipline					
2.	There is no need to teach social norms and rules to the Child, he will learn by himself.	No	180(92.8)	235(95.9)	297(90)	x^2=8.27 p=0.016*

3.	If you wish that child should do particular task, there is no need for him to know the rationale , the child has to do it.	No	164(84.5)	219(89.4)	273(82.73)	x^2=5.10 p=0.078
4.	Parents should immedi- ately follow statements or promises made by them.	Yes	144(74.2)	166(67.7)	266(80.61)	x^2= 6.52 p=0.038*
5.	Rules will be effective de- spite there is no uniformity among parents.	No	118(60.8)	125(51)	136(41.21)	x^2=19.23 p<0.001*
6.	Discipline in right direc- tion is only taught by repeated statement like, 'Don't do this', 'Don't do that'.	No	150(77.3)	170(69.4)	188(59.97)	x^2=23.47 p<0.001*
8.	Children should know rules made for them in advance.	Yes	118(60.8)	162(66.1)	239(72.42)	x^2=13.57 p=0.001*
9.	Pampering / Threaten- ing is effective method to make child do work and it is always successful.	No	141(72.7)	181(73.9)	249(75.45)	x^2=0.52 p=0.771
11.	Little physical punish- ment may be necessary if required.	Yes	151(77.8)	183(74.7)	158(47.88)	x^2=65.48 p<0.001*
15.	Punishment in presence of other is more effective.	No	184(94.8)	229(93.5)	296(89.70)	x^2=5.31 p=0.070
25.	During adolescence, relaxation in rules lead to behavioral disturbance, so we should be stricter dur- ing this phase.	No	138(71.1)	167(68.2)	192(58.18)	x^2=10.93 p=0.004*
			Quality time			
12.	We should spend maxi- mum quality time with children.	Yes	179(92.3)	236(96.3)	313(94.84)	x^2=3.57 p=0.168
			Parental Marital Life			
16.	Parent should sacrifice their own needs and dedicate their life for child rearing.	No	32(16.5)	36(14.7)	66(20)	x^2=2.90 p=0.235
18.	When child is kept at the centre of family, the distance between parents increases rather than re- ducing.	Yes	113(58.2)	131(53.5)	259(78.48)	x^2=5.12 p=0.077
			Help in Difficult situation			
13.	In difficult situation, we should not help child despite he accepts his mistake.	No	163(84)	208(84.9)	249(75.45)	x^2=9.94 p=0.007*

20.	When child is in trouble, best way to help him is to take decision for him and give direct solution.	No	75(38.6)	113(46.1)	155(46.97)	x^2=3.75 p=0.153
	Respect					
14.	We should not give respect to child as he is younger in age (i.e. saying 'thank you', 'sorry').	No	136(70.1)	200(81.6)	238(72.12)	x^2=9.54 p=0.008*
17.	Parent should expect respectful behavior from children.	Yes	184(94.8)	226(92.2)	314(95.15)	x^2=2.39 p=0.303
	Comparison					
23.	Comparing children with other children in areas, in which they are weak, will be beneficiary to children.	No	119(61.3)	187(76.3)	271(82.12)	x^2=28.49 p<0.001*
10.	Allowing children to take small decisions in day to day life may lead them to take wrong decisions in future.	No	142(73.2)	172(70.2)	170(51.52)	x^2=32.75 p<0.001*
19.	Children should be given task and responsibilities as per his age.	Yes	193(99.5)	235(95.9)	311(94.84)	x^2=8.98 p=0.011*
21.	The best way give guid- ance is to impose our own thoughts, likes and dislikes on children.	No	161(83)	206(84.1)	247(74.85)	x^2=9.04 p=0.011*
22.	As child grownup, we should give more inde- pendence.	Yes	189(77.1)	164(84.5)	247(74.85)	x^2=6.85 p=0.033*
	Reality Orientation					
24.	The sole responsibility of mother is of child rearing and father's is to look for disciplinary issues.	No	71(36.6)	99(40.4)	151(45.76)	x^2=34.87 p<0.001*

Item-wise analyses using a Bonferroni-corrected significance threshold (α = 0.002) highlighted both positive evolutionary shifts and concerning trends in specific parenting constructs over the 24-year span.

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted across 25 statements to evaluate shifts in parenting knowledge across three decades (2001, 2011, and 2024). Out of the evaluated areas, statutory significant chronological shifts were observed in multiple core dimensions, particularly concerning discipline strategies, child autonomy, and domestic gender roles.

Parental attitudes toward nurturing boundaries remained consistently high and stable over the 24-year period, showing no statistically significant variation as an overwhelming majority of parents consistently recognized that parental love should be unconditional.

Statements 4 and 8 more parents agreed in area of healthy way of discipline, which is also statistically significant. Less percentage of parents were agreed than previous responses on statements 11 (Physical punishment) this sharpest paradigm shifts were observed within parental disciplinary models, indicating a massive decline in the endorsement of physical enforcement and rigid authoritarian practices.

Significant improvements in protecting children from negative social comparisons (Statement 23), but revealed growing anxieties surrounding early independence (statement 22).

Responses on statement 14 (70.1%, 81.6% vs 72.12%) peaked in 2011 but fell back by 2024, displaying an overall fluctuating but significant trend.

Parental perceptions of gender-segregated rearing duties as per statement 24 showed a highly significant historical shift suggested by more disagreement on "on sole responsibility of mother is of child rearing and father's is to look for disciplinary issues." (36.6%, 40.4% vs 45.7%) over decades.

Modern parents (2024) are increasingly fearful of granting micro-autonomy to children, showing significant drops in letting children make daily choices or navigate self-independence, as per statement 10, 19, 21 and 25.

Recognition that rules require parental uniformity (statement 5) dropped significantly from 60.8% in 2001 to 41.21% in 2024 which is statistically significant. (χ^2=19.23, p<0.001).

When dealing with adversity, modern parents were significantly less likely to withhold support if a child made a mistake, showing a positive trend per responses of statement 13 is also statistically significant.

Parents should immediately follow statements or promises made by them was agreed upon by more number of parents in 2024 (74.2%, 67.7% vs 80.6%) this change was also statistically significant.

Response of parents in areas of expression of love, quality time, parent's marital life, helping child in troublesome situation, reality orientation was almost similar among all three cohorts. No statistically significant changes were found in these areas in three cohorts.

DISCUSSION

This study evaluated changes in parental views regarding child rearing over two decades (2001 to 2024). While overall parenting attitude scores remained stable between 2001 and 2011, a statistically significant reduction in continuous knowledge scores was observed in 2024 (M = 17.78). Domain-specific analyses reveal a complex interplay of positive evolutionary shifts alongside emerging areas of concern.

A significant positive trend was observed in parental attitudes toward gender-stereotyped parenting roles. Disagreement with statement 24 ("sole responsibility of mother is child rearing while father's is discipline") increased from 36.6% in 2001 to 45.8% in 2024 (p < .001). This shift reflects evolving socio-cultural norms in urban India, encouraging shared parental involvement. Similarly, endorsement of peer comparison as a motivational tool (Item 23) dropped significantly, with disagreement rising from 61.3% in 2001 to 82.1% in 2024 (p < .001). Modern parents demonstrate greater awareness of the psychological harms of peer comparison on child self-esteem. Which was also reported by Hemang Shah [8].

It is also interesting to know that responses in some areas of discipline, similar to those of earlier responses by parents (i.e. social norms, discrepancy between parents for rules, repeated advised, and strict attitude during adolescent) are required for child compliance. Similar finding was observed by Owen in his review of forty-one studies of children ranging in age from 1½ to 11 years. Reprimand and negative nonverbal responses consistently resulted in greater compliance. Praise and positive nonverbal responses resulted in mixed child outcomes [9].

Our finding about parenting for adolescent (Statement 25) is similar to finding by Borawski EA [10] who also suggested, a reasonable amount of monitoring is an important practice for parents of older adolescents, managing their behavior through negotiation of unsupervised time may have mixed results leading to increased experimentation but perhaps in a more responsible way [10].

Majority of Parents were of opinion that we should give respect to child in spite of the fact that he is younger in age (i.e. Saying 'thank you', 'sorry'), (70.1%, 81.6% vs 72.12%) and also more number of parents now insisted on child being always respectful towards parents (94.8%, 92.2% vs 95.15%) encouraging friendly interactions. This kind of parental respect for children's behaviour (including decision-making and prespect for human rights) perceived by middle school students had a significant positive impact on self-esteem which in long run help to prevent depression reported by Sangmi Lee [11].

More than 80% parents believe that they should consider child's care as priority rather than their own satisfaction in 2024 which was 85% in 2001 and 86% in 2012 suggests some improvement in parental view. Similar finding was observed in Japanese mothers by Sonoko Egami [12] while using Intensive Parenting Attitude Questionnaire. She found parents should prioritize their children above all and remain devoted to them, such attitudes could be the driving force behind Japanese mothers' strong sense of child-rearing responsibility.

Though most parents would endorse helping child in difficult situation in 2001(84%) and 2012 (84.9%), however in 2024 (74.45%) endorse this. This indicating statistically significant difference in attitudes over this area in last decades. Yet taking decision on behalf of child and giving direct solution was disagreed by comparatively more number of parents in 2012 (46.1%) and 2024 (46.9%) as compared to back in 2001 (38.6%). This indicates a slow drift in parental attitudes in favourable direction.

Conversely, several discipline constructs showed concerning trends. Correct responses regarding the necessity of inter-parental uniformity (Item 5) dropped from 60.8% in 2001 to 41.2% in 2024 ($p < .001$). Furthermore, correct views on avoiding continuous negative reprimands ("Don'ts", Item 6) decreased from 77.3% to 60.0% ($p < .001$). In the autonomy domain, support for allowing children to make small daily decisions (Item 10) declined sharply from 73.2% in 2001 to 51.5% in 2024 ($p < .001$). This trend reflects parents are overprotective or overindulgent.

Over all there were more positive attitude on 5 statements (4, 8, 14, 23, and 24) and negative trend on 10 statements (2, 5, 6, 11, 25, 13, 10, 19, 21, and 22). Sonoko Egami [12] reported that positive parenting trend actively fosters a nurturing environment crucial for children's healthy development. On the other hand, negative parenting behaviors, including harsh discipline or inconsistency, are linked to adverse child outcomes, such as behavioral problems and lower prosocial behavior. Importantly, their findings highlight that negative parenting does not inversely contribute (i.e., by its absence) to positive child outcomes. So, we need to work more for positive changes in all areas.

CONCLUSION

Parental attitudes over two decades demonstrated significant domain-specific changes. Positive shifts were observed in reducing peer comparison and dismantling traditional gender-stereotyped parenting roles. However, concerning trends emerged regarding reduced support for child autonomy, overprotection, and lack of discipline uniformity. Targeted, culturally responsive parenting education programs are recommended to foster balanced, evidence-based rearing practices.

Implications

This study evaluated changes in parental views regarding child rearing over two decades (2001 to 2024). While overall parenting attitude scores remained stable between 2001 and 2011, a statistically significant reduction in continuous knowledge scores was observed in 2024 ($M = 17.78$). Domain-specific analyses reveal a complex interplay of positive evolutionary shifts alongside emerging areas of concern.

On most child rearing practices, parental views did change over a decade. However, there are areas, in which parental views go negatively over decades definitely need to be addressed. This can be done by positive parenting programme [13]. The attitudes regarding provision of independence and autonomy to the children need to be improved and over involvement of parents and their overprotective approach should be changed.

Traditional view that women should be sole contributor in child rearing practices also now changing according to the changing socio-cultural trends in the country. These changes can only be brought by educating parents and creating awareness about proper child rearing practices, and creating awareness about long term consequences of improper child rearing practices and benefits of behavioral modification [13]. Prevention of various child and adolescent psychiatric disorders can be achieved through these interventions thereby reducing the burden on health resources and economy [14]. Over all findings suggest that an intensive parenting attitude has both positive and negative effects on mothers and children alike, pointing to potentially far-reaching implications for our society at large. [12]. Mental health professionals as psychiatrists, psychologists can be of immense help in bringing out the desired outcome.

Limitation of Study

Sample size in each year of purposive data collection is different.

It is a purposive sampling from single primary school limits generalization.

Demographic shifts across cohorts—specifically the higher representation of 1st-standard parents (52.4%) and changes in maternal education levels in the 2024 sample—may represent confounding variables influencing discipline attitudes.

Cultural, educational and financial status of each parent were not considered in the assessment as all of these as those

may represent confounding variables influencing parenting strategies.

It is difficult to identify that responses given in the form are opinion of either by mother, by father or given jointly, as it can also affect the response pattern.

STATEMENTS

Conflicting Interest

The Authors declares that there is no conflict of interest'.

The study was accorded Ethical Committee Approval No. APP 2024/18 dated 24/7/24.

The study was carried out in accordance with the principles as enunciated in the Declaration of Helsinki.

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