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Parenting Styles and Adult Life Satisfaction in India: A Narrative Review of Evidence from Indian Adult Samples

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Abstract: Life satisfaction is a central cognitive component of subjective well-being and reflects an individual's overall evaluation of life. Parenting styles and remembered parental rearing experiences may be associated with adult well-being, but the strength and consistency of these associations in Indian samples remain uncertain. This narrative review synthesises Indian studies published from 2015 to 2026 that examined parenting or perceived parental rearing alongside life satisfaction in adult samples. A structured, documented search of scholarly web sources and journal repositories was undertaken, supplemented by backward reference tracking from a relevant Indian study published in 2021. Studies were screened for Indian sampling, adult participants, a parenting-related exposure, and a direct life-satisfaction measure. Four studies were identified as potentially relevant to the review: Rani, Singh, and Jaiswal (2016), Singh, Thapliyal, and Chowdhury (2021), Chugh and Dutt (2025), and Dhatri et al. (2026). The studies differed in their operationalisation of parenting, participant groups, and analyses. Rani et al. reported that remembered parental rearing dimensions explained a modest proportion of variance in life satisfaction. Singh et al. reported a positive correlation between an aggregate parenting-style score and life satisfaction, although the reporting does not establish style-specific associations. Chugh and Dutt reported no significant association in their young-adult and working-adult groups. Dhatri et al., studying working mothers' current parenting styles, found a weak, nonsignificant association between parenting-style scores and life satisfaction. Overall, the available evidence is limited and methodologically heterogeneous. It does not support a definitive conclusion that a particular parenting style consistently predicts adult life satisfaction in India. More transparent, adequately powered studies using validated measures, clearly defined adult samples, and culturally responsive designs are needed.

Keywords: Parenting styles, Parental rearing, Life satisfaction, Adults, India, Narrative review

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1. Introduction

Life satisfaction refers to an individual's cognitive evaluation of the quality of their life according to personally selected standards. It is commonly distinguished from momentary affect and is treated as a core component of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1985; Diener & Ryan, 2009). The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) is one of the most widely used measures of this construct and assesses global life evaluation rather than satisfaction with a single domain (Diener et al., 1985; Pavot & Diener, 2008). Understanding the developmental and relational factors associated with life satisfaction is relevant to adult development, family psychology, and mental-health research.

Parenting styles describe relatively enduring patterns of parental responsiveness and demandingness. Baumrind's framework distinguishes authoritative parenting, characterised by warmth and clear expectations; authoritarian parenting, characterised by control and an emphasis on obedience; and permissive parenting, characterised by warmth with comparatively few limits (Baumrind, 1966, 1971). Maccoby and Martin (1983) extended this framework by distinguishing four patterns through the combination of responsiveness and demandingness, including neglectful or uninvolved parenting. Darling and Steinberg (1993) further conceptualised parenting style as the emotional climate in which specific parenting practices occur.

The association between parenting and well-being may persist beyond childhood through internalised expectations, emotion-regulation habits, self-evaluation, coping patterns, and adult relationship experiences. Attachment theory proposes that early caregiving contributes to internal working models of the self and others (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1989). Self-determination theory suggests that social contexts that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness facilitate psychological functioning and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). These perspectives offer plausible explanations for associations between remembered parenting and adult outcomes, but they do not establish that parenting style is a direct or independent cause of life satisfaction.

Cultural context is particularly important when interpreting parenting in India. Family relationships may involve strong interdependence, obligations to elders, and continuing parental involvement in adult decisions, although practices vary substantially by region, class, religion, household structure, and generation (Chadda & Deb, 2013; Tuli, 2012; Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010). Parenting behaviours described as strict or controlling in one setting may carry different meanings in another; however, cultural explanations should be tested empirically rather than assumed. Cross-cultural work has debated the transferability of conventional parenting-style typologies and shown that associations can vary across cultural groups (Chao, 1994; Rudy & Grusec, 2006; Sorkhabi, 2005).

International studies have examined parenting styles in relation to life satisfaction in adolescents, university students, and emerging adults. For example, Lavrič and Naterer (2020) investigated exposure to parenting styles and life satisfaction across ten Southeast European countries, while Stavrulaki et al. (2021) examined parenting styles, academic achievement, and life satisfaction among college students. Such research provides a useful conceptual comparison, but it cannot be treated as evidence about Indian adult samples. The present review therefore centres on studies conducted in India and distinguishes findings about adults' own current parenting from findings about adults' remembered experiences of being parented.

An earlier review by Sahithya et al. (2019) synthesised Indian research on parenting styles and outcomes in children and adolescents. The current review addresses a related but distinct question: what direct evidence is available from Indian adult samples on parenting-related variables and life satisfaction? Rather than assuming that findings from children or other countries apply to Indian adults, this review assesses the amount, character, and limitations of directly relevant evidence.

1.1 Review Questions

The review was guided by three questions: (a) What Indian studies published between 2015 and 2026 have examined parenting styles or perceived parental rearing in relation to life satisfaction among adults? (b) What findings have these studies reported, and how comparable are their measures and samples? (c) What methodological and conceptual gaps should guide future research?

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2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Parenting Styles and Perceived Parental Rearing

Parenting style and parental rearing are related but not interchangeable constructs. The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) assesses perceived parental authority in terms of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive patterns. Other instruments assess dimensions such as emotional warmth, rejection, overprotection, or differential treatment. These dimensions may capture meaningful aspects of early family experience without mapping exactly onto Baumrind's three-style typology. For this reason, the present review retains each study's terminology and avoids relabelling parental-rearing dimensions as categorical styles when the original measure does not justify that interpretation.

2.2 Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a global cognitive judgement about one's life, not a synonym for self-esteem, resilience, emotion regulation, psychological well-being, or marital satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985; Pavot & Diener, 2008). The present review gives priority to studies that directly measured life satisfaction using the SWLS or another clearly identified life-satisfaction measure. Studies that measured only proximal constructs are not treated as direct evidence for the central association.

2.3 Potential Explanatory Pathways

Remembered parenting may relate to adult life satisfaction through several possible pathways. Emotional warmth and acceptance may support a stable sense of worth and relational security; autonomy-supportive parenting may help develop competence and agency; and patterns of parental control may shape emotion regulation and coping. These are plausible theoretical pathways, not established mediators in the Indian studies reviewed here. Adult well-being is also shaped by current relationships, employment, economic security, health, personality, and broader social conditions. Accordingly, a correlation between remembered parenting and life satisfaction should not be interpreted as a causal effect without appropriate longitudinal or experimental evidence.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design

This paper uses a narrative review design with a structured search and explicit eligibility criteria. The review is not presented as a systematic review, and no meta-analysis was attempted. A narrative approach was selected because the located studies were few, differed in their definitions of parenting and adult populations, and did not provide sufficiently comparable statistics for quantitative synthesis.

3.2 Search Strategy

A web-based scholarly search was conducted in October 2026, with a publication window of 2015–2026. Search phrases included combinations of "parenting style," "perceived parenting," "parental rearing," "life satisfaction," "Satisfaction With Life Scale," "adult," "young adult," "working adults," "India," and "Indian." Targeted searches were conducted in journal repositories and scholarly records, including the International Journal of Indian Psychology, the International Journal of Interdisciplinary Approaches in Psychology, publisher pages, ResearchGate records, and citation trails. The references in Singh, Thapliyal, and Chowdhury's (2021) paper were used as a supplementary source of candidate studies. Search results were checked for population, construct, year, and country where the accessible record allowed.

The search was not exhaustive across all bibliographic databases. PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science were not comprehensively searched, and access to full texts varied. Consequently, the studies identified should be understood as the evidence located through the documented search rather than proof that no other eligible studies exist.

3.3 Eligibility Criteria

Studies were considered relevant when they (a) were published between 2015 and 2026; (b) used an Indian sample or clearly reported data collection in India; (c) included adult participants aged 18 years or older; (d) measured a parenting-style or perceived parental-rearing construct; and (e) directly measured life satisfaction using the SWLS or another identifiable instrument. Studies with mixed adolescent–adult samples were not treated as eligible unless adult-only

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results could be separated. Studies examining current parenting practices in adults were distinguished from studies examining remembered experiences of being parented. This distinction was retained because the two research questions concern different directions of the family–well-being relationship.

3.4 Data Extraction and Synthesis

For each candidate study, information was extracted from accessible records concerning authorship, publication year, setting, sample, measures, and principal findings. When the full text or age range was not verifiable, the study was not treated as confirmed eligible evidence. Findings were synthesised narratively by study and by conceptual focus. Because the evidence base was small and measures differed, no pooled estimate was calculated. The review did not apply a formal risk-of-bias instrument; methodological concerns are described qualitatively.

4. Results

4.1 Overview of the Located Evidence

The search identified a small group of Indian publications that directly connect parenting-related measures with life satisfaction in adult samples. Four studies were retained as relevant to the narrative synthesis, although they do not all investigate the same parenting construct. Rani et al. (2016) examined adults' perceived parental rearing experiences; Singh et al. (2021) assessed perceived parenting style and life satisfaction among young adults; Chugh and Dutt (2025) examined parenting style and life satisfaction in young and working adults; and Dhatri et al. (2026) studied current parenting styles and life satisfaction among working mothers. The results therefore span both remembered parenting and participants' own current parenting. These domains are discussed separately to avoid treating them as equivalent.

4.2 Studies of Remembered Parental Rearing and Adult Life Satisfaction

Rani, Singh, and Jaiswal (2016) investigated satisfaction with life in relation to perceived parental rearing styles among married Indian adults. The available abstract reports a sample of 600 Hindi-speaking married adults, with an equal representation of men and women and 10–20 years of married life. The researchers administered Hindi versions of the Perceived Parental Rearing Style Questionnaire (PPRSQ) and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). Their stepwise regression analyses considered parental rejection, emotional warmth, overprotection, and favouring a particular child. The four dimensions collectively accounted for 8.371% of the variance in life satisfaction; emotional warmth alone accounted for 8.140% in the reported model sequence. The authors interpreted the findings as evidence of an association between recalled parental rearing and life satisfaction in the Indian cultural context.

This study is particularly relevant because it uses an adult sample and a direct measure of life satisfaction. At the same time, the PPRSQ dimensions should not be interpreted as direct tests of the authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive categories unless the instrument and analyses explicitly support that mapping. The accessible record provides the abstract but not the full article; details such as the full model coefficients, confidence intervals, and all diagnostic information could not be independently checked. The study therefore provides relevant but incompletely verifiable evidence.

4.3 Studies of Perceived Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction among Young and Working Adults

Singh, Thapliyal, and Chowdhury (2021) examined parenting style, emotion regulation, and life satisfaction in young adults in India. The article reports that 150 participants were recruited and that 130 were retained after data cleaning. Participants were aged 18–35 years. The study used the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), SWLS, and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). The authors reported a positive correlation between the overall parenting-style score and life satisfaction ($r = .451$, $p < .01$), and a positive correlation between emotion regulation and life satisfaction ($r = .842$, $p < .01$).

The study offers direct evidence because both parenting and life satisfaction were measured in an adult sample. However, the results do not clearly identify separate associations for authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting. The article also contains reporting details that warrant caution, including a life-satisfaction mean that appears difficult to reconcile with the scale scoring described in the methods. The reported correlation should therefore be presented as the authors' result, not as a verified style-specific effect. The cross-sectional design also precludes causal conclusions.

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Chugh and Dutt (2025) examined parenting style, defence mechanisms, and life satisfaction among 100 Indian participants divided equally between young adults aged 18–25 and working adults aged 26–45. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and completed standardised questionnaires online. The authors reported that parenting styles were not significantly associated with life satisfaction among young adults. In the working-adult group, parenting style was also not significantly associated with life satisfaction, although associations involving defence mechanisms were reported. This study is important because it includes adult age groups beyond the conventional university-student sample and reports findings that do not support a uniformly positive parenting–life-satisfaction association. The sample was small, however, and the authors acknowledged reliance on self-report and the lack of control for potential confounding variables.

4.4 Studies of Current Parenting and Life Satisfaction Among Adult Parents

Dhatri, Juliana, Sanju, and Shalini (2026) investigated work stress, current parenting styles, and life satisfaction among 75 working mothers in India. The study used a work-stressor questionnaire, a Parenting Styles Dimensions Questionnaire, and the SWLS. The authors reported a negative association between work stress and life satisfaction ($\rho = -.316$, $p = .006$), a positive association between work stress and parenting-style scores ($\rho = .327$, $p = .004$), and a weak, nonsignificant association between parenting-style scores and life satisfaction ($\rho = -.097$, $p = .409$). They also reported that authoritarian and permissive styles were associated with higher work stress.

This study meets the broad criterion of measuring current parenting styles and life satisfaction in an adult Indian sample, but it addresses a different question from research on the long-term influence of childhood parenting. Here, the participant is the parent, and the exposure is her own parenting practice; in studies such as Rani et al. (2016) and Singh et al. (2021), the focus is the adult's perception of how they were parented. The result should be interpreted within the context of working mothers and work stress rather than generalised to all Indian adults.

4.5 Candidate Studies Not Confirmed for the Primary Evidence Base

Mishra (2024), in "Relationship of Perceived Parenting Styles, Resilience and Life Satisfaction Among Youth," reported positive associations between authoritative parenting and both resilience and life satisfaction. The article is available through the International Journal of Interdisciplinary Approaches in Psychology. However, the accessible record did not provide enough verifiable information about the sample's exact age range, sample size, and statistical estimates to confirm that it meets the adult-only criterion and to extract its results reliably. It is therefore treated as a potentially eligible study requiring full-text verification rather than as confirmed evidence in the primary synthesis.

Aman's study of parental authority, personality, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction among school-going children was excluded because its participants were minors. Similarly, the 2026 study by Kapur and Sethi on perceived parenting styles, imposter phenomenon, and life satisfaction included participants aged 15–24; adult-only results were not available separately in the accessible record. Such studies may inform a broader developmental discussion but cannot be counted as adult-only evidence under the present criteria.

5. Discussion

5.1 Main Findings

The review identified a limited number of Indian studies that directly measured parenting-related constructs and life satisfaction in adults. The findings are mixed. Rani et al. (2016) reported that remembered parental rearing dimensions explained a modest proportion of variance in life satisfaction. Singh et al. (2021) reported a positive correlation between an aggregate parenting-style score and life satisfaction, but the analysis does not establish which parenting style accounted for that association. Chugh and Dutt (2025) found no significant association in their young-adult and working-adult groups. Dhatri et al. (2026), examining participants' current parenting, likewise found a weak, nonsignificant relationship between parenting-style scores and life satisfaction among working mothers.

These results do not justify a general claim that authoritative parenting consistently predicts higher life satisfaction among Indian adults, nor that authoritarian or permissive parenting consistently predicts lower satisfaction. The studies use different parenting constructs, include different adult groups, and examine different relational directions. The evidence is better characterised as sparse and heterogeneous than as uniformly supportive or contradictory.

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5.2 Why the Findings May Differ

Several factors may explain the variation. First, measurement differs: the PPRSQ assesses dimensions of remembered parental rearing, whereas the PAQ assesses perceived parental authority, and the Parenting Styles Dimensions Questionnaire in Dhatri et al. (2026) assesses participants' own parenting practices. These instruments do not necessarily measure the same construct. Second, adult roles differ. Married adults with 10–20 years of marriage, university-linked young adults, working adults, and working mothers may experience different stressors and sources of life satisfaction. Third, sample size and convenience sampling may limit precision and representativeness. Finally, current family relationships, economic conditions, employment, health, personality, and cultural expectations may influence both recalled parenting and present life satisfaction.

5.3 Cultural Interpretation

Indian family life is diverse, and it would be inappropriate to treat Indian parenting as a single cultural pattern. Norms concerning respect, interdependence, autonomy, parental involvement, and family obligation vary across communities and households. Theoretical work suggests that the meaning of control and responsiveness can be culturally contingent (Chao, 1994; Rudy & Grusec, 2006; Sorkhabi, 2005). Yet the studies reviewed here do not directly test whether cultural values moderate the relationship between parenting and adult life satisfaction. Cultural explanations should therefore be treated as hypotheses for future research rather than as established explanations for the observed results.

5.4 The Research Gap

The principal gap is not the absolute absence of Indian research. Rather, the literature located for this review contains few studies that simultaneously provide a clearly defined adult Indian sample, a specified parenting construct, a validated direct measure of life satisfaction, and sufficiently transparent statistical reporting. The evidence is also fragmented across remembered parental rearing, perceived parenting authority, and current parenting practices. Because these constructs address different questions, they should not be combined uncritically.

Further limitations include the concentration of studies in convenience samples, small samples in some recent studies, cross-sectional designs, limited reporting of effect sizes and confidence intervals, and insufficient adjustment for potential confounders. The potential relevance of Mishra (2024) illustrates a further issue: accessible abstracts may suggest a direct association, but incomplete reporting of age range and statistics can prevent reliable inclusion. Comprehensive database searching and full-text verification are needed before the number of eligible Indian studies can be stated definitively.

A strong next step would be a multi-region study of adults aged 18 years and above that measures recalled maternal and paternal parenting separately, uses a validated parenting-style instrument and the SWLS, and reports correlations, regression coefficients, confidence intervals, and model diagnostics. Analyses should account for age, gender, socioeconomic circumstances, current family relationships, and major adult roles. Longitudinal designs would help establish temporal ordering, while qualitative research could clarify how adults interpret warmth, strictness, autonomy, and obligation within different Indian family contexts.

5.5 Implications

For researchers, the findings highlight the need for more precise operational definitions and transparent reporting. Parenting dimensions should be analysed and interpreted according to the properties of the instrument rather than automatically collapsed into style labels. For practitioners, the current evidence does not support using remembered parenting style as a stand-alone predictor of an adult client's life satisfaction. Family history may be explored as one aspect of a broader psychosocial assessment, while taking account of present circumstances and individual differences. Policy or programme recommendations cannot be derived confidently from the small and heterogeneous evidence base.

6. Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this review is its India-focused scope and its distinction between remembered parental rearing and current parenting practices. It prioritises direct life-satisfaction outcomes rather than treating self-esteem, resilience, emotion regulation, or general psychological well-being as equivalent constructs. It also makes uncertainty explicit when an accessible record does not permit full verification.

The review has important limitations. The search was web-based and did not comprehensively cover PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, or all relevant

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Indian academic repositories. Search dates and records should be archived and independently replicated before formal submission. Full texts were not accessible for every candidate study, and the review did not use two independent reviewers or a formal quality-appraisal instrument. Some included studies contain unclear or potentially inconsistent statistical reporting. The findings are therefore provisional and should not be interpreted as an exhaustive census of all Indian studies published from 2015 to 2026.

7. Conclusion

Indian research published between 2015 and 2026 provides some direct evidence concerning parenting-related experiences and adult life satisfaction, but the evidence base remains limited and heterogeneous. Remembered parental rearing dimensions have been associated with life satisfaction in one large adult sample, and one young-adult study reported a positive association between an aggregate parenting score and life satisfaction. Other studies found no significant relationship, including a study of young and working adults and a study of working mothers' current parenting practices. Differences in constructs, samples, and reporting prevent straightforward comparison. The most defensible conclusion is that the relationship between parenting and adult life satisfaction in India remains insufficiently established. Larger, better reported, culturally responsive and preferably longitudinal studies are required.

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