

Practicing of Coercive Parenting Style in an Inner-City Community in Central Village, Jamaica, and the Impact on their Children's Behaviour

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Abstract

This study explores the effects of coercive parenting on children's behaviour within the inner-city community of Central Village, St. Catherine, Jamaica. Using a quantitative research design, 100 questionnaires were administered—60 to parents and 40 to children—to assess parenting practices and their psychological and behavioural impact. Analysis using descriptive statistics, reliability testing, factor analysis, and correlation revealed a high prevalence of coercive parenting, often associated with low income and limited educational attainment. Most participating parents earned between USD \$1,000 and USD \$3,000 annually, and 71.7% had not progressed beyond high school. Children exposed to coercive discipline demonstrated behavioural issues such as emotional instability, defiance, and antisocial tendencies. The findings highlight a concerning link between socioeconomic challenges, harsh disciplinary methods, and negative developmental outcomes in children. The study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and parenting education programs in marginalized Jamaican communities.

Keywords: Authoritarian Parenting, Child Behaviour, Coercive Parenting, Inner-City Community, Parenting Style.

Introduction

Preface

Parenting is defined as the act of supporting a child's development throughout their physical, emotional, and cognitive growth. It also involves instilling discipline, values, and ethical conduct. In Jamaica, several parenting styles are commonly practiced, including permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and coercive parenting.

Coercive parenting, in particular, has been associated with adverse effects on both the mental and physical well-being of children. Studies suggest that children raised in environments where aggression—especially physical aggression—is normalized, are more likely to display aggressive behaviors themselves [1]. These children often internalize violence as a defense mechanism in stressful

situations. Frequently, the cycle of aggression begins in the home and extends to peers, teachers, and community members. For many, violence becomes a survival strategy, reinforced by cultural narratives such as “only the strong survive” [2]. In various countries, aggressive discipline is seen as culturally acceptable, even though it significantly affects the development of young people. This study centers on coercive parenting and its influence on the behavior of children in such socio-cultural settings.

Background to the Study

The concept of coercive parenting can be better understood by examining the meaning of “coercion,” which, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, is the act of compelling or frightening others to act against their will. Coercive individuals often exert power through

threats or physical force to make others comply [3]. In the context of parenting, coercive parents demand obedience from their children, often using verbal or physical punishment to enforce rules without considering the child's perspective [4].

This form of parenting may result in two major outcomes: children become either fearful and submissive, or resistant and rebellious. Research indicates that in inner-city communities, approximately 70.8% of parents frequently yell at their children, while 43% resort to physical punishment when rules are disobeyed [5]. Such parenting behaviors are linked to increased arrogance or defiance in adolescents, and in many cases, lead to delinquent or criminal activities.

Statement of the Problem

Central Village, located in St. Catherine, Jamaica, is often stigmatized due to prevalent gang activities and informal housing developments. The community comprises primarily female-headed households and experiences high levels of unemployment. Children are frequently seen loitering unsupervised, even during school hours.

The behavior of many of these children is concerning—they engage in fights, use abusive language, steal, and destroy property. When confronted, their parents may respond with vulgar insults and threats such as, “Mi shud a squeeze a kill yuh when mi a birth yuh” (I should have killed you at birth) or “Yuh a go end up a jail like yuh Pupa” (You’ll end up in prison like your father). Physical punishment often follows, using anything from sticks and shoes to machetes. To escape these experiences, children may seek refuge on the streets, becoming susceptible to negative influences such as gangs, turf wars, gambling, or theft.

According to recent media reports, a significant number of Jamaican youths have been arrested for serious crimes—78 for shootings, 148 for firearm possession, and 63 for aggravated robbery [6]. Reverend Dwight

G. Peccoo of the Central Village New Testament Church of God has called for more government investment in youth intervention programs and parenting workshops. Unfortunately, such appeals have largely been ignored.

The Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) [7] reported that 80% of Jamaican children have experienced some form of violent discipline, 65% face bullying at school, and 79% have witnessed violence in their communities or homes. Various organizations, including UNICEF, IDRC, and the Inter-American Development Bank, have funded interventions, but most focus on broader socioeconomic issues rather than the direct impact of parenting. As noted by [8], violent parental discipline can perpetuate aggression in children, underlining the urgent need to examine parenting practices in communities like Central Village where violence is entrenched.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the practice of coercive parenting within Central Village and evaluate its impact on children's behavior.

Significance of the Study

Findings from this research are expected to support local and international stakeholders—such as the Social Development Commission (SDC), Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF), National Parenting Commission (NPC), and UNICEF—in designing effective interventions. These may include parenting workshops, behavior modification programs, and community outreach efforts aimed at fostering healthier family dynamics. Ultimately, the goal is to encourage harmonious coexistence and reduce hostility within families.

It is anticipated that the knowledge gained through such programs will bring about lasting behavioral change in both parents and children, especially in communities affected by social and economic hardships.

Research Objectives

The central objective of the study is to assess how coercive parenting influences the behavior of children in Central Village. Specific objectives include:

To determine the prevalence of coercive parenting in Central Village, St. Catherine.

To identify the characteristics of parents who practice coercive parenting.

To evaluate the behavioral impact of coercive parenting on children.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

What are the characteristics of parents who use coercive parenting in Central Village?

What behavioral effects does coercive parenting have on their children?

How do parents and children perceive coercive parenting practices?

Operational Definition of Terms

Inner-city community: As defined by the Oxford Dictionary, these are unstructured settlements predominantly inhabited by low-income residents.

Youths-at-risk: According to Oxford Bibliographies, these are children or adolescents disadvantaged by factors such as disability, substance abuse, or mental health challenges, often placing them at greater risk of negative outcomes.

Research Hypothesis

Null Hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between parenting characteristics (permissive, authoritarian, authoritative) and coercive behavior in Central Village.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between parents' coercive behavior and their children's behavior.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between parenting characteristics and children's behavior.

Alternative Hypotheses:

H₁₁: Parenting characteristics are significantly related to coercive behavior.

H₁₂: Parents' coercive behavior significantly influences children's behavior.

H₁₃: Parenting characteristics significantly affect children's behavior.

Limitations of the Study

The study is geographically limited to Central Village and uses standardized scales that may not be culturally adaptable. The sample size is relatively small, which may affect generalizability [9]. Additionally, the study relies on self-reported data, which may lead to social desirability bias [10]. Participants may underreport negative behaviors or hesitate to disclose sensitive information due to privacy concerns [11]. Other variables that influence child behavior—such as teacher involvement, nutrition, peer influence, and government policies—are not considered in this study.

Organization of the Study

The thesis is structured into five chapters. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review. Chapter 3 explains the methodology. Chapter 4 presents the data and analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the findings and outlines the conclusions and recommendations.

Literature Review

Preface

This section introduces the literature supporting the investigation into coercive parenting in Central Village, Jamaica. It highlights the need to explore how such parenting styles influence children's behavior and development, laying the foundation for a focused conceptual framework.

Parenting and Parenting Styles

Parenting involves guiding children through developmental stages, instilling discipline, values, and emotional support [14]. Scholars argue that effective parenting requires

consistency and routine [15]. As parenting evolves, various styles have emerged—permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and coercive—each shaped by personal values, cultural context, and life experience [16, 17].

Permissive parents offer minimal control, allowing children to make decisions independently [16]. Authoritarian parents, by contrast, exert high control with rigid expectations [18]. Authoritative parenting provides balanced guidance, respecting autonomy while enforcing boundaries [19]. Coercive parenting, however, is marked by force, fear, and dominance [20].

Coercive Parenting and Its Comparison to Other Types

Coercive parenting manifests through intimidation, punishment, and emotional suppression [15, 20]. It often involves yelling, beating, and an unwillingness to listen to the child's voice [21, 22]. While it shares similarities with authoritarian parenting—such as expecting unquestioned obedience—coercive parenting is harsher and more punitive [24, 25].

Authoritative parenting differs significantly, promoting open dialogue and understanding [26]. Permissive parents avoid conflict and offer freedom without fear or punishment [17]. Thus, coercive parenting stands out as emotionally damaging, often fostering compliance through fear rather than mutual respect.

Coercive Parenting Practices in Inner-City Communities

Coercive parenting is prevalent in inner-city communities where economic stress and low educational levels correlate with harsh discipline [27, 28]. Studies show that over 40% of parents in such areas use verbal and physical punishment regularly [29]. This environment fosters either extreme submission or rebellion in children.

Research highlights severe emotional consequences: depression, fear, low confidence, and fragile parent-child relationships [30]. Many children internalize violence as normal, which can perpetuate cycles of aggression. Nearly 36% of children in these communities' experience clinical levels of depression due to ongoing parental abuse [29, 30].

Coercive Parenting and Youths-at-Risk

Empirical studies show that children with developmental disabilities are particularly vulnerable to coercive parenting [1, 29, 30]. Lacking the capacity to understand or meet parental demands, these children often face impatience and punishment instead of support [20, 31]. Their dependence on parents, coupled with behavioral challenges, leads to increased risk of mistreatment.

Punishment methods such as screaming, spanking, or banning privileges are often used with little understanding of their long-term impact [32]. While some discipline methods may yield short-term compliance, they are largely ineffective for long-term behavioral development and emotional regulation.

Western and Eastern literature alike reveal a link between coercive parenting and child psychopathology, such as depression and peer violence. However, gaps remain in understanding how cultural context moderates these effects [32].

Conceptual Framework

This study employs a quantitative survey design using close-ended questionnaires administered to parents and children. Parents' coercive behavior is measured using a validated scale [33], while children's behavioral traits—oppositional defiance, antisocial tendencies, emotional struggles, and positive development—are assessed using tools adapted from [34].

Children also evaluate their parents' style across three dimensions—permissive,

authoritarian, and authoritative—using scales developed by [35]. The framework acknowledges cultural nuances and introduces the concept of “mindful parenting,” which emphasizes empathy, non-judgment, and emotional presence [36-38]. Research suggests that mindfulness in parenting fosters healthier relationships and reduces the risk of coercive practices.

Research Methodology

Preface

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study, including the research design, sampling techniques, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods. It concludes by discussing ethical considerations and presenting the research timeline and budget.

Research Design

Research methodology refers to the systematic and scientific approach to solving research problems. It involves identifying how knowledge is obtained and utilized in a structured manner. The choice of research design depends on factors such as the study's objectives, population, sampling techniques, and data types. Figure 3.1 illustrates different types of research designs. (Source: Primary data).

This study used an exploratory design in the early stages to frame its objectives and hypotheses. A qualitative approach guided the literature review and the development of the questionnaire, while a quantitative approach guided sampling and statistical analysis. Ultimately, a conclusive design was used for drawing findings and conclusions, specifically employing a descriptive survey design.

The following research questions were addressed:

What are the characteristics of parents who practice coercive parenting in Central Village?

What impact does coercive parenting have on children's behavior?

What are the views of parents and children regarding coercive parenting?

The study adopted a cross-sectional design, collecting data only once from each respondent. Participants were not observed over time, ensuring independence in responses.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of parents and children living in the inner-city community of Central Village, St. Catherine, Jamaica. According to the Social Development Commission (SDC, 2019), Central Village has a population of approximately 21,000. The area was selected based on reports of high child involvement in criminal activity.

A sampling frame was obtained from the SDC office, and a purposeful sampling technique was employed to select 100 participants, 60 adults (each with at least one child) and 40 children—who all resided in the community. Adults ranged in age from 18 to mid-50s, while children were between 10 and 17 years old. The final sample size was $n = 100$.

Data Collection Instrument

A close-ended questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool. This method was selected due to the limited availability of secondary data related to parenting styles and child behavior in the target community. Primary data was deemed more relevant, specific, and reliable for meeting the study's objectives [2].

The questionnaire consisted of two sections:
Section A (Parents): Self-administered.

Section B (Children): Conducted via structured interviews and recorded by the researcher.

Measurement scales included:

Parental coercive behavior: Assessed using a 5-item scale adopted from [3].

Child behavior: Rated by parents using a scale adapted from [4], covering:

1. Oppositional defiant behavior (12 items)
2. Positive development (9 items)

3. Antisocial behavior (6 items)
4. Emotional difficulties (6 items)

Parenting characteristics: Evaluated by children using a 30-item scale measuring:

1. Permissiveness
2. Authoritarianism
3. Authoritativeness

(Scale adapted from [5])

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated “strongly agree” and 5 indicated “strongly disagree.” Responses with means <3 reflected agreement; means >3 indicated disagreement. The full instrument is included in the study annex.

Data Collection Methods

Initial entry into the community required permission from local leaders (see Appendix A). Meetings were arranged to explain the research purpose, followed by data collection sessions at the community center.

Parents: Completed questionnaires either in person ($n = 47$) or electronically ($n = 13$). The electronic group was given seven days to respond, with reminders sent as needed.

Children: Were interviewed individually by the researcher at assigned times. No assistance was provided or required during the interviews. Each session lasted approximately one hour. Children answered independently and were encouraged to read and mark their answers.

The process ensured voluntary participation and comprehension of all questions. All responses were gathered within the scheduled time frame.

Reliability and Validity

Cronbach’s Alpha was used to test the internal reliability of the scales, while exploratory factor analysis assessed construct validity [6, 7]. Both tests were conducted using SPSS. Factor loadings and cross-loadings were evaluated to ensure the constructs’ accuracy. Detailed reliability and validity results are presented in Chapter Four.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed a structured analysis framework adapted from [8], which involves:

Step 1: Calculating response rate and assessing response bias using frequency tables.

Step 2: Organizing and coding data. Each questionnaire item was assigned a numerical code and entered into SPSS. Visual inspection and descriptive statistics (frequencies and distributions) were used to identify missing or out-of-range responses. Three missing values were found and imputed using the item mean.

Step 3: Applying appropriate statistical methods. Techniques included frequency tables, percentages, cumulative percentages, and descriptive charts. Inferential methods used:

Pearson correlation matrix to assess relationships between variables.

Regression analysis to test research hypotheses.

Ethical Issues

Ethical approval was obtained, and participants were required to sign informed consent forms (see Appendix E). Consent included assurances of privacy, voluntary participation, and the use of coded pseudonyms for anonymity [9, 10]. Participants’ rights to confidentiality and withdrawal were respected throughout the research.

Research Timeline and Budget

Effective time management was a priority. As noted by [11], planning data collection and analysis timelines is critical to project success. The researcher adhered to a detailed timeline to ensure each phase of the study was completed on schedule. The estimated budget for conducting the study was JMD 85,000.00.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Preface

This chapter presents and analyzes data gathered from surveys administered to parents

and children in the inner-city community of Central Village, Jamaica. It includes demographic information, reliability and validity testing of the instrument, and statistical analyses such as descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression. The analysis aims to evaluate coercive parenting practices and their impact on children's behavior.

Demographic Summary

Out of 75 families contacted, 60 (80%) participated in the study. For children, 40 out of 60 responded (66.7%). Among the parents, 60% were female and 40% male. Most parents were aged between 35 and 55 years, with 43.3% in the 35-45 range. A majority (51.7%) had an annual income below \$1,000. Regarding education, 48.3% completed high school, 16.7% were graduates, and only 6.7% attained postgraduate education. These demographics support findings from St. Catherine LSDP (2016) that link low income and education to high crime rates [1].

Among the children, 55% were boys and 45% girls. Most (45%) were aged 12–14. Education data revealed 70% were not currently attending school. Family structure indicated that 42.5% lived in single-parent households.

Reliability and Validity

The instrument's internal consistency was verified using Cronbach's Alpha. All scales exceeded the 0.7 threshold, indicating high reliability (e.g., Parents' Coercive Behavior = 0.88; Oppositional Defiant Behavior = 0.931; Permissiveness = 0.935) [2]. Validity was assessed via KMO and Bartlett's tests. For the children's behavior scale, KMO = 0.698, and for the parents' characteristics scale, KMO = 0.643, both supporting the appropriateness of factor analysis [3].

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics indicated a general mean below 3 for most items, showing agreement with coercive parenting behaviors. Items related to child oppositional defiant

behavior—such as losing temper or yelling—had means below 2. Child Positive Development items were above 3, suggesting lower endorsement of positive behaviors.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation results revealed several significant relationships:

Highest positive correlation: Authoritarian parenting and Child Emotional Difficulties ($r = 0.351$).

Significant correlation between Parents' Coercive Behavior and Child Antisocial Behavior ($r = 0.311$).

Strongest negative correlation: Permissive parenting and Child Emotional Difficulties ($r = -0.383$).

These correlations were statistically significant at the 0.05 level [4].

Regression Analysis

Three regression models were tested:

Model 1: Predicting Parents' Coercive Behavior using parenting styles (Permissive, Authoritarian, Authoritative). $R^2 = 0.08$; not statistically significant ($p = 0.388$). Hypothesis H01 accepted.

Model 2: Predicting Children's Behavior using Parents' Coercive Behavior. $R^2 = 0.071$; statistically significant ($p = 0.039$). Hypothesis H02 rejected; H12 accepted.

Model 3: Predicting Children's Behavior using Parenting Characteristics. $R^2 = 0.048$; not statistically significant ($p = 0.614$). Hypothesis H03 accepted.

Summary and Conclusion

The results confirm that coercive parenting in Central Village is significantly associated with children's behavioral outcomes, particularly antisocial behavior. Most parents have low education and income levels, which correlate with negative parenting practices. While parenting characteristics were not significant predictors of coercive behavior or child outcomes in this study, coercive behavior alone had a clear, measurable impact.

The instrument used was both reliable and valid, and the findings support the study's significance. The use of SPSS software for analysis and clear presentation tools, such as charts and tables, strengthened the findings. Participants voluntarily engaged with the study, and no material compensation was provided.

Discussion of Findings

The study sought to assess coercive parenting practices in Central Village, St. Catherine, Jamaica, and evaluate their impact on children's behavior. The findings reveal that coercive parenting is prevalent in the community. Most parents reported agreement with coercive practices, evidenced by item means below 3 on the Likert scale. This supports the first objective—to determine the extent of coercive parenting—which was clearly affirmed.

Low parental income and education levels were consistent among respondents. A majority earned under \$3,000 annually, with 51.7% below \$1,000, mirroring patterns of economic instability identified by the World Bank (2018) [1]. Education levels were similarly low, with only 6.7% of parents having post-secondary qualifications. Children's schooling was also limited—70% were not currently enrolled. These findings align with previous reports [2, 3] linking poor socioeconomic conditions to higher crime and reduced child development in Jamaica.

Children demonstrated elevated signs of oppositional defiant behavior and emotional difficulty. Questions such as “loses temper” and “threatens others” had mean values below 2, suggesting strong parental agreement on these negative traits. These results correlate with those in the Jamaica Red Cross Biennial Report (2016), which emphasized the need for community-based interventions to combat youth violence [4].

Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of parents who practice coercive parenting?

Although regression analysis showed no statistically significant relationship between selected parenting styles (Permissive, Authoritarian, Authoritative) and coercive behavior (Sig = 0.388), authoritarian and authoritative parents showed stronger tendencies toward coercive patterns than permissive ones. Permissive parenting was negatively associated with coercive behavior ($\beta = -0.098$), though the effect was not strong [5].

Research Question 2: What impact does coercive parenting have on children's behavior?

There was a significant positive relationship between coercive parenting and children's behavior (Sig = 0.039; $\beta = 0.267$), confirming the hypothesis H12. Children exposed to coercive parenting were more likely to exhibit antisocial behavior and emotional difficulties. This aligns with international literature asserting that coercion exacerbates developmental challenges in youth [6].

Research Question 3: What are the views of parents and children on coercive parenting?

Correlations showed a strong relationship between authoritarian parenting and child emotional distress ($r = 0.351$) and a negative correlation between permissive parenting and child emotional issues ($r = -0.383$). Parents and children seem to perceive authoritarian styles as emotionally harmful, while permissiveness may promote emotional security, though it was scarcely practiced [7].

Results of Hypothesis Testing

H01 Accepted: No significant relationship between parenting styles (Permissive, Authoritarian, Authoritative) and coercive parenting behavior (Sig = 0.388).

H12 Accepted: Significant relationship between Parents' Coercive Behavior and Children's Behavior (Sig = 0.039; $\beta = 0.267$).

H03 Accepted: No significant relationship between parenting styles and child behavior (Sig = 0.614).

Theoretical Contributions

This study adds to the behavioral sciences by empirically linking parenting practices with child behavioral outcomes in under-researched Jamaican inner-city contexts. It validates the use of behavioral scales and draws connections between socioeconomic variables and parenting style, encouraging future studies in related areas.

Practical Contributions

The findings can support interventions led by NGOs and government agencies to improve parenting practices. Awareness campaigns, community workshops, and stakeholder partnerships can foster safer family environments. The study also advocates for greater parental self-awareness and policy interventions aimed at child safety and youth development [8].

Limitations

The study relied solely on self-reported data from parents and children, without teacher or third-party observations. It excluded other contributing factors such as peer influence, food security, and school resources. Cultural sensitivity of the measurement tools and the relatively small sample size also limit generalizability.

Conclusion

The study concludes that coercive parenting is widespread in Central Village and significantly affects children's behavior. The findings highlight low household income, poor education, and limited school attendance as key contextual challenges. Although certain parenting styles were not statistically linked to coercive behavior, coercive parenting itself was strongly related to negative child outcomes. These results validate concerns from both local and international reports about youth vulnerability in high-risk communities.

Key Takeaways

Coercive parenting is prevalent.

Children display signs of emotional and behavioral distress.

Socioeconomic deprivation underlies both parenting and child development challenges.

Permissive parenting is rare, but appears to support emotional stability.

Recommendations

Broaden future studies to include factors like peer influence, teacher involvement, and government policy.

Use advanced statistical techniques like Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to validate constructs.

Introduce and evaluate parenting education programs targeting coercive tendencies.

Develop community-based social intervention models, including counseling and mentorship.

Expand the study scope to other urban areas to identify national patterns.

Pursue longitudinal studies to assess behavioral change over time.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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