Parenting Styles and Coping Strategies Among Vietnamese Adolescents

Tran Thu Huong[1], Tran Thu Huong[2], Pham Manh Ha[3], Pham Hanh Dung[4], Trinh Bao Tram[5], Nguyen Thi Kim Thoa[6]

Abstract

Coping ability is one of the crucial factors helping adolescents face and overcome changes and difficulties during this developmental stage. The selection and use of coping strategies by adolescents are influenced by various factors from family, school, and social environment, including parenting styles. This study aims to examine the influence of parenting styles, as perceived by adolescents, on their coping strategies. Using a cross-sectional design, the study employed the Proactive Coping Inventory and Parenting Scale. Results showed that parental autonomy support, psychological control, and behavioral control have different effects on adolescents' coping strategies.

Keywords: *Parenting, Parenting Style, Coping Strategy, Adolescent.*

Introduction

How individuals cope with stressful situations is considered crucial, affecting the impact of stress on their adjustment and health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This becomes particularly evident during adolescence when rapid physical, cognitive, and emotional changes, as well as shifts in social roles and status, make new challenges more frequent and difficult for adolescents. Learning and choosing ways to cope with these changes and issues is vital for healthy development. Scientists suggest that family provides the primary context for children to learn coping with stress (Compas et al., 1992), with parenting styles significantly impacting children's choice of coping strategies.

Coping refers to thoughts and behaviors individuals use to manage internal and external stressful situations. Accordingly, coping strategies are relatively stable, consistent sets of behaviors that individuals exhibit to cope with stressful situations.

Greenglass et al. (1999) proposed and measured seven coping strategies:

Proactive coping involves anticipating or detecting potential stressors and taking preemptive action

Reflective coping includes brainstorming, analyzing problems and resources, and generating hypothetical plans

Strategic planning focuses on breaking down large tasks into manageable components

Preventive coping relates to anticipating potential stressors and preparing before they develop

Instrumental support seeking focuses on obtaining advice and feedback

Emotional support seeking aims to regulate temporary emotional distress through sharing

Avoidance coping involves escaping or postponing action in stressful situations

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[1] Department of Social Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Email: huonghn1978@gmail.com.
[2] Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities,
[3] VNU University of Education.
[4] Institute of Research and Practical Psychology Lumiere.
[5] University of Economics and Business, Vietnam National University.

[6] Vietnam Military Technical Academy

Method

Study Design

The study employed a cross-sectional design with convenience sampling of middle school students from northern Vietnamese provinces, including Hanoi, Vinh Phuc, Thai Nguyen, and Bac Giang. All data were collected in September 2023.

The research team contacted middle school administrators in the study areas, requesting assistance in connecting with homeroom teachers and subsequently distributing research participation invitations to students. Students were required to obtain parental permission for participation. Those with parental consent returned confirmation through their homeroom teachers, after which the authors provided questionnaires with blank envelopes to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Questionnaires were collected through homeroom teachers, who emphasized the importance of honest responses and assured students that their answers would not be judged or evaluated.

The Ethics Committee for Biomedical Research at VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Hanoi approved this study on October 11, 2022 (Decision No. 2863/QĐ-XHNV).

Participants

The study included 1,065 middle school students, comprising 45.4% males (n = 483) and 54.6% females (n = 582). Participants ranged in age from 10 to 16 years (M = 12.75, SD = 1.15). Grade distribution was as follows: 34.1% sixth grade (n = 363), 28.7% seventh grade (n = 306), 23.4% eighth grade (n = 249), and 13.8% ninth grade (n = 147).

Measures

Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI)

The PCI, developed by Greenglass et al. (1999), assesses responses to various situations. The original 137-item version with 18 subscales was shortened to 55 items measuring seven strategies, standardized on Canadian students (Greenglass, 2002).

The PCI was translated into Vietnamese through a rigorous process involving:

- Independent translation by a psychologist and professional translator

- Integration of translations

- Pilot testing with 50 randomly selected middle school students

- Modification of culturally inappropriate items

- Second pilot testing with 50 different subjects

The final version includes 55 items across seven subscales:

- Proactive coping (14 items, α = .89)

- Reflective coping (11 items, α = .91)

- Strategic planning (4 items, α = .83)

- Preventive coping (10 items, α = .91)

- Instrumental support seeking (8 items, α = .88)

- Emotional support seeking (5 items, α = .82)

- Avoidance coping (3 items, α = .76)

Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = "not at all true" to 4 = "completely true"), with three items reverse-scored.

Parenting Scale

This self-report measure for adolescents contains 25 items across three subscales for each parent:

Autonomy Support (10 items)

From Revised CRPBI (Schaefer, 1965)

Example: "Parent talks to me warmly and friendly"

α = .84 (father), .87 (mother)

Psychological Control (10 items)

Eight items from PCS-YSR (Barber, 1996)

Two additional items based on student feedback

Example: "Parent feels I can't take care of myself without them"

α = .73 (father), .76 (mother)

Behavioral Control (5 items)

From Barber et al. (2005)

Example: "Parent lets me make my own decisions"

α = .75 (father), .77 (mother)

Items are rated on a 3-point scale (1 = "never" to 3 = "frequently"), with some items reverse-scored.

Table 1. Reliability of Measures Used In The Study

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's α	Item-Total Correlations
Proactive Coping Inventory			
Proactive coping	14	.89	.336 - .725
Reflective coping	11	.91	.604 - .748
Strategic planning	4	.83	.614 - .694
Preventive coping	10	.91	.613 - .737
Instrumental support seeking	8	.88	.615 - .710

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's α	Item-Total Correlations
Emotional support seeking	5	.82	.577 - .644
Avoidance coping	3	.76	.566 - .615
Parenting Scale			
Father autonomy support	10	.84	.382 - .650
Mother autonomy support	10	.87	.464 - .706
Father psychological control	10	.73	.362 - .553
Mother psychological control	10	.76	.380 - .564
Father behavioral control	5	.75	.450 - .619
Mother behavioral control	5	.77	.486 - .589

Analysis

The data analysis strategy involved multiple steps:

Preliminary Analysis

Data screening for normality and outliers using Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests

Missing data analysis (< 5% missing values, handled through multiple imputation)

Internal consistency checking using Cronbach's alpha

Descriptive statistics for all variables

Primary Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients to examine bivariate relationships

Hierarchical multiple regression with two models:

Model 1: Proactive coping as dependent variable

Model 2: Avoidance coping as dependent variable

Control variables (age, gender) entered in Step 1

Parenting variables entered in Step 2

Assumption Testing

Normality: Skewness and kurtosis within ±2

Multicollinearity: VIF < 3 for all predictors

Homoscedasticity: Examined through residual plots

Independence: Durbin-Watson statistics between 1.5-2.5

Results

Coping Strategies Among Middle School Students

Table 2. Coping Strategies Among Middle School Students (N = 1,065)

Strategy	M	SD	Range
Preventive coping	2.91	0.62	1-4
Reflective coping	2.88	0.60	1-4
Instrumental support seeking	2.83	0.61	1-4
Proactive coping	2.80	0.46	1.29-3.86
Strategic planning	2.80	0.69	1-4
Emotional support seeking	2.78	0.69	1-4
Avoidance coping	2.55	0.75	1-4

Note. All strategies showed mean scores above 2.5 on a 4-point scale, indicating frequent use of multiple coping strategies.

Perceived Parenting Styles

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of Parenting Styles (N = 1,065)

Parenting Dimension	Parent	M	SD
Autonomy Support	Father	2.34	0.44
	Mother	2.51	0.44
Psychological Control	Father	1.68	0.37
	Mother	1.68	0.39
Behavioral Control	Father	1.81	0.47
	Mother	1.77	0.45

Correlations Between Study Variables

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Coping Strategies															
1. Proactive Coping	2.80	0.46	-												
2. Reflective Coping	2.88	0.60	.65**	-											
3. Strategic Planning	2.80	0.69	.58**	.61**	-										
4. Preventive Coping	2.91	0.62	.62**	.59**	.57**	-									
5. Instrumental Support	2.83	0.61	.54**	.52**	.48**	.51**	-								

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
6. Emotional Support	2.78	0.69	.49**	.47**	.45**	.48**	.58**	-							
7. Avoidance Coping	2.55	0.75	-.25**	-.22**	-.19**	-.21**	-.15**	-.12**	-						
Father's Parenting															
8. Autonomy Support	2.34	0.44	.34**	.28**	.31**	.34**	.27**	.31**	.04	-					
9. Psychological Control	1.68	0.37	-.16**	-.10**	-.10**	-.15**	-.03	-.07*	.17**	-.38**	-				
10. Behavioral Control	1.81	0.47	-.30**	-.31**	-.25**	-.37**	-.21**	-.16**	-.12**	-.35**	.32**	-			
Mother's Parenting															
11. Autonomy Support	2.51	0.44	.39**	.30**	.29**	.35**	.27**	.32**	.05	.42**	-.22**	-.19**	-		
12. Psychological Control	1.68	0.39	-.26**	-.12**	-.09**	-.14**	-.04	-.09**	.14**	-.21**	.45**	.18**	-.41**	-	
13. Behavioral Control	1.77	0.45	-.24**	-.26**	-.17**	-.25**	-.19**	-.17**	-.09**	-.18**	.16**	.44**	-.33**	-.35**	-

Note. N = 1,065. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Variables are grouped into coping strategies and parenting dimensions for father and mother separately. For all scales, higher scores indicate greater levels of the construct. Coping strategies were measured on a 4-point scale; parenting dimensions were measured on a 3-point scale.

- p < .05, ** p < .01

Regression Analysis Results

Table 5. Regression Models Predicting Coping Strategies from Parenting Styles

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Model 1: Proactive Coping ($R^2 = .194$, F = 43.609, p < .001)					
Father's Autonomy Support	.111	.040	.105	2.779	.006
Mother's Autonomy Support	.273	.042	.259	6.484	<.001
Father's Behavioral Control	-.186	.037	-.188	-5.029	<.001
Model 2: Avoidance Coping ($R^2 = .047$, F = 14.173, p < .001)					
Father's Psychological Control	.330	.093	.162	3.559	<.001
Mother's Psychological Control	.069	.090	.035	.768	.443

Discussion

Cultural Context and Findings

Our findings must be interpreted within the unique cultural context of Vietnamese families. Several cultural factors appear particularly relevant:

Traditional Family Hierarchy

Vietnamese families typically maintain a hierarchical structure where fathers hold primary authority

This explains our finding of higher behavioral control from fathers (M = 1.81) compared to mothers (M = 1.77)

Contrasts with Western studies showing higher maternal control (Wei & Kendall, 2014)

Reflects the traditional Vietnamese concept of "phụ đạo" (paternal guidance)

Confucian Values

Emphasis on filial piety (hiếu) influences parent-child relationships

Children's obedience and respect for parents considered virtuous

May explain high levels of parental control being accepted by adolescents

Reflects in correlation patterns between psychological control and coping (r = .17, p < .01)

Consistent with the cultural value of "kính trên nhường dưới" (respect for elders)

Maternal Role in Vietnamese Culture

Mothers traditionally responsible for daily care and emotional support

Higher autonomy support from mothers (M = 2.51) versus fathers (M = 2.34)

Stronger positive correlation between mother's autonomy support and proactive coping (r = .39, p < .01)

Reflects cultural concept of "strict father, gentle mother" (nghiêm phụ từ mẫu)

Demonstrates the continuing influence of traditional gender roles in parenting

Educational Context

High academic pressure in Vietnamese society

Parents' involvement in academic matters often manifests as behavioral control

May explain negative correlation between parental behavioral control and proactive coping

Suggests potential tension between traditional parenting and modern coping needs

Reflects the cultural emphasis on academic achievement ("thi cử")

Modernization Influences

Emerging shift from traditional to modern parenting approaches

Urban families showing more autonomy support

Reflects in positive correlations between autonomy support and adaptive coping strategies

Suggests gradual transformation of Vietnamese parenting styles

Indicates potential generational shifts in parenting practices

Cultural Implications for Coping Development

The interaction between traditional Vietnamese parenting and adolescent coping strategies reveals several important patterns:

Adaptive Coping Development

Higher maternal autonomy support predicts stronger proactive coping ($\beta = .259$, $p < .001$)

Reflects successful integration of traditional nurturing role with modern parenting approaches

Suggests importance of balancing cultural values with developmental needs

Demonstrates positive adaptation of traditional parenting roles

Avoidance Coping Patterns

Psychological control's positive relationship with avoidance coping ($\beta = .162$, $p < .001$)

May reflect cultural emphasis on harmony and conflict avoidance

Raises questions about long-term effectiveness in modern context

Suggests potential need to modify traditional approaches

Support-Seeking Behaviors

Moderate correlations between parental autonomy support and support-seeking strategies

Influenced by collective cultural orientation

Suggests importance of family support systems in Vietnamese society

Reflects traditional values of family interdependence

Limitations and Future Directions

Methodological Limitations

Cross-sectional design limits causal inferences

Convenience sampling may affect generalizability

Self-report measures subject to social desirability bias

Limited geographic scope within northern Vietnam

Future Research Directions

Longitudinal studies to examine developmental patterns

Multiple informant approaches including parent perspectives

Cross-cultural comparative studies with other Asian contexts

Investigation of modernization effects on parenting-coping relationships

Examination of urban-rural differences

Analysis of socioeconomic influences on parenting styles

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent coping strategies in Vietnam. The findings highlight the importance of parental autonomy support in developing adaptive coping mechanisms and the potential negative impact of excessive psychological control. The results should be interpreted within the context of Vietnamese cultural values and ongoing societal changes, particularly the tension between traditional parenting practices and modern developmental needs. Understanding these relationships can inform culturally sensitive interventions to support both parents and adolescents in navigating the challenges of development in a changing society.

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