

PARENTING AND EMOTIONAL BONDING TO NEPALESE PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: MOTHERS' PERSPECTIVES FROM DIVERSE SOCIOCULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

PATERNIDADE E VÍNCULO AFETIVO COM CRIANÇAS EM IDADE PRÉ-ESCOLAR NO NEPAL: PERSPECTIVAS DE MÃES DE DIFERENTES ORIGENS SOCIOCULTURAIS

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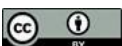
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Abstract

Maternal perceptions and practices underpin the development and behavioral sensitivity of preschool children, yet research on day-to-day parenting practices is scarce in Nepal. This study aims to explore the voices of Nepali mothers regarding how they perceive and practice parental care and emotional bonding toward their preschool children in the Rupandehi district of Nepal within diverse socio-cultural context. In-depth interviews were conducted with thirteen mothers of preschool-aged children in Rupandehi district, Nepal. Data were analyzed thematically and identified five key themes: discipline as a strategy for behavioral control, affection and emotional bonding, fulfilling children's demands as parental care, the importance of obedience and educational behavior, and social interaction with guests and relatives. The study found that mothers adopt diverse parenting techniques. Some rely on fear-based or punitive strategies, while others emphasize emotional bonding, affection and supportive communication. These practices are shaped by cultural norms, social context, ethnicity and level of education. However, most mothers valued obedience, respectful behavior, and appropriate social interaction. This study provides insights for readers how culturally embedded parenting practices influence early childhood development. It suggests that parenting interventions and early childhood education programs should be context-sensitive and promoting positive discipline, emotional bonding, and balanced caregiving practices adaptable across diverse sociocultural settings.

Resumo

As percepções e práticas maternas são fundamentais para o desenvolvimento e a sensibilidade comportamental de crianças em idade pré-escolar; no entanto, as pesquisas sobre as práticas diárias de criação dos filhos são escassas no Nepal. Este estudo tem como objetivo explorar as vozes de mães nepalesas sobre como elas percebem e praticam os cuidados parentais e o vínculo emocional com seus filhos em idade pré-escolar no distrito de Rupandehi, no Nepal, dentro de um contexto sociocultural diversificado. Foram realizadas entrevistas em profundidade com treze mães de crianças em idade pré-escolar no distrito de Rupandehi, no Nepal. Os dados foram analisados tematicamente, identificando-se cinco temas principais: disciplina como estratégia de controle comportamental, afeto e vínculo emocional, atendimento às demandas das crianças como cuidado parental, a importância da obediência e do comportamento educacional, e a interação social com convidados e parentes. O estudo constatou que as mães adotam diversas técnicas de criação dos filhos. Algumas recorrem a estratégias baseadas no medo ou punitivas, enquanto outras enfatizam o vínculo emocional, o afeto e a comunicação solidária. Essas práticas são moldadas por normas culturais, contexto social, etnia e nível de escolaridade. No entanto, a maioria das mães valorizava a obediência, o comportamento respeitoso e a interação social adequada. Este estudo oferece insights aos leitores sobre como as práticas parentais culturalmente enraizadas influenciam o desenvolvimento na primeira infância. Ele sugere que as intervenções parentais e os programas de educação infantil devem ser



Keywords: Child Discipline. Emotional Bonding. Mothers' Perception. Qualitative Research. Preschoolers' Development.

sensíveis ao contexto e promover disciplina positiva, vínculo emocional e práticas de cuidado equilibradas, adaptáveis a diversos contextos socioculturais.

Palavras-chave: *Disciplina Infantil. Vínculo Emocional. Percepção das Mães. Pesquisa Qualitativa. Desenvolvimento de Crianças em Idade Pré-Escolar*

1 INTRODUCTION

Home, where learning starts, and parents, the first teachers who connect with their children, actually set the stage for how children behave, think, and conduct themselves in school. It is not just about rules or routines; it is about everything from hugs and conversations to basic support, and it matters for every part of their growth (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 2001). Traditional approaches focused on strict authority and physical punishment, but scholars note a move toward methods that promote children's well-being and positive growth (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Contemporary parenting emphasizes positive strategies. Parents now nurture, guide, and communicate rather than rely on punishment (UNICEF, 2017; WHO, 2020). Research shows that children raised in supportive and affectionate environments develop better self-regulation, social skills, and emotional stability (Steinberg, 2001).

Attachment theory highlights how emotional bonds shape child development. Secure attachment between caregivers and children builds a foundation for emotional regulation and social adjustment (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). Similarly, Social Learning Theory shows that children learn by watching and imitating their parents. Modeling positive behaviors can influence children as much as direct instruction or punishment (Bandura, 1977). Together, these theories help frame how discipline, affection, and meeting children's needs work in everyday parenting.

In Nepal, parenting reflects sociocultural norms, family structures, and traditional expectations. Respect for elders, obedience, and family harmony guide many mothers' child-rearing practices (Keller, 2018). Mothers usually take the primary caregiving role, nurturing, guiding, and disciplining children daily and shaping how children learn and behave (Poudel, 2024; Khadka, 2021). The children from supportive parents and show

warmth, children develop stronger self-esteem and better social skills (Malla *et al.*, 2024). A positive home environment also helps young children build resilience and protects their mental health (Adhikari *et al.*, 2025). Further studies in Nepal highlight that mothers there blend old and new parenting styles. They mix gentle discipline with encouragement, affection, and even rewards (Sharma *et al.*, 2025). All of this points to a shift away from strict punishment, moving instead toward more positive, culturally aware parenting. Still, we don't fully understand how mothers from different backgrounds define and carry out these practices.

Despite growing research on parenting in Nepal, gaps remain. Most studies focus on children's education or mental health (Adhikari *et al.*, 2025; Chaulagain *et al.*, 2019). Few examine the relational and emotional aspects of parenting, such as how mothers manage caregiving practices. Sociocultural diversity in Nepal including differences in ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic status likely shapes parenting beliefs and practices, but researchers rarely explore these differences in depth (Bennett, 2005; Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2022; Adhikari *et al.*, 2025). Studying mothers' experiences reveals culturally grounded ways to support healthy parent-child relationships and these insights can guide policies, interventions, and programs that help families thrive (WHO, 2020; Basnyat, 2025). Therefore, this study aims to explore the voices of Nepali mothers regarding how they perceive and practice parental care and emotional bonding toward their preschool children in the Rupandehi district of Nepal within diverse socio-cultural context. By focusing on mothers' lived experiences, the study fills a gap in Nepalese parenting research and contributes to global discussions on culturally informed, positive parenting.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study site and context

The qualitative phenomenological study was conducted in the Rupandehi District of Nepal, which encompasses diverse cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. We purposely selected 3 types (sub-metropolitan city, municipality, rural municipality) of local government units to provide a variety of perspectives on urban and rural parenting

approaches. This gave us a chance to see how parenting changes depending on living situations, culture, and education. The study explores how mothers think about parenting behaviors and what their children need—all the things that help them shape and maintain their relationships with their children.

2.2 Participants

In this study, we included thirteen mothers of preschool-aged children from community-managed Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers. We selected them purposefully to reflect a wide range of sociocultural and educational backgrounds that permitted us to explore how mothers differ in their beliefs and practices around maternal strategies and meeting children's needs. The mothers represented diverse caste and ethnic groups from different socio-demographic backgrounds where three illiterate mothers were selected as of Mother 4 (Tarai caste), Mother 9 (Tarai Dalit), and Mother 11 (Janajati). Similarly, six mothers had basic education as of Mother 1 (Tarai Dalit), Mother 5 and 10 (Dalit), Mother 6 (Tarai caste), Mother 12 (Advantaged Janajati), and Mother 13 (Janajati). Further, four mothers had completed secondary education and above as of Mother 2, 3, and 8 (Advantaged caste) and Mother 7 (Advantaged Janajati). This diversity permitted to capture rich and nuanced mothers' experiences showing how sociocultural and educational variances shape parenting practices in Nepalese families. Data collection continued until data saturation, ensuring that the full range of mothers' perspectives on caregiving practices. The study excluded mothers of the children who had mental disorders and could not give useful information.

2.3 Data collection and analysis

Lived information were collected through in-depth interviews in April and May 2021. The interviews were about how mothers expressed emotional bonding, keeping discipline, showing affection and meeting the needs of their preschoolers. Interviews were held at either ECD centers or the participants' homes, depending on what they felt comfortable with. Choosing places that people were already familiar with made the setting more comfortable and made it easier for people to talk openly. Along with the

permission of the participants, interviews were audio-recorded with their consent. Finally, the transcriptions were read in front of the participants to make sure they were correct and to capture the participants' real-life experiences. The data was analyzed using an Inductive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, codes were derived from participants' responses through the generation of emerging concepts, after which they were grouped into three levels of themes (i.e., basic, organizing and global) representing the essence of maternal beliefs and experiences (i.e., representational).

2.4 Trustworthiness

To ensure that this qualitative research study produced dependable results, the trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used as standards throughout the research process. The study-maintained reliability by utilizing a systematic and cross-checked coding approach combined with an audit trail of the data collection, transcription, coding, and thematic analysis procedures where records were kept for all decisions made. To create credibility, the key quotations were directly preserved to maintain the validity and richness of the data. Ultimately this process identified core patterns in mother's perception and practice on practices of discipline, warmth, and fulfillment of demands to their children. To enable readers to judge the potential use of the results of this qualitative research study in other sociocultural contexts, the researchers provided detailed information about: characteristics of the participants, an explanation of the setting of the study, and the context of the study. Using these strategies consistently (during recruiting participants, collecting data, transcribing, coding, and developing themes), the researchers established trustworthiness through rigor and authenticity by providing reliable insight into how Nepalese mothers discipline, express affection and make demands of their children.

2.5 Ethical considerations

The Ethical Review Board (ERB approval No. 2078-56/2021) of the Nepal Health Research Council gave ethical approval for the data collection. Once participants discussed all aspects of their participation including confidentiality of their answers and

that this was completely voluntary, all the identifiable information would be removed before use and they could withdraw their participation at any time without penalty if they wish, they signed an informed consent form.

3 FINDINGS

The study identified five interrelated themes: strategy for behavioral control, affection and emotional bonding, fulfilling children's demands as parental care, importance of obedience and educational behavior, and social interaction with guests and relatives.

3.1 Strategy for behavioral control

Mothers reported diverse approaches to disciplining their children, reflecting varying beliefs about effective behavioral control. Some mothers endorsed punitive strategies, including scolding and physical punishment, as necessary to regulate children's behavior. For instance, one mother explained:

"I have tried to encourage my children without using punishment; however, my children can only be controlled by using punishment." (Mother 9)

Similarly, another mother emphasized the role of fear in ensuring compliance:

"If I do not use disciplining and frightening methods, with whom will she be frightened to and want to be a good child?" (Mother 10)

These accounts indicate that some mothers perceive punishment as an essential tool for maintaining authority and promoting obedience.

In contrast, other mothers rejected physical punishment and instead emphasized affection and patience as effective disciplinary strategies. One participant noted:

"I do not punish my children. I would never hit them, even when they are aggressive. If I never punish them, they will learn to be good." (Mother 1)

This perspective reflects a belief that positive reinforcement and emotional support can shape children's behavior without the use of fear.

3.2 Affection and emotional bonding

Emotional closeness emerged as a central component of parenting across participants. Mothers described various ways of expressing affection, including physical contact, verbal communication, and shared activities.

For example, one mother described her daily interactions:

“When I’m with my child, I talk to her and I sing songs and poems. I hold her in my lap.” (Mother 2)

Another mother emphasized physical affection:

“I love him a lot and I kiss him all the time, so he’s never afraid of me.” (Mother 5)

Avoidance of physical punishment was also associated with emotional security:

“I have never hit my children. I love them so much that it could be why they do not have any fears of me.” (Mother 1)

While expressions of affection varied slightly by educational background such as structured activities among more educated mothers and physical affection among less educated mothers the underlying emphasis on emotional bonding was consistent across all groups. Mothers viewed affection as essential for building trust, reducing fear, and strengthening the parent–child relationship.

3.3 Fulfilling children’s demands as parental care

Many mothers associated fulfilling children’s needs and desires with expressions of love and care. For some, meeting these demands required significant personal or financial sacrifice. One mother stated:

“I fulfill every need of my child, even if I have to borrow money from relatives.” (Mother 1)

Another mother linked fulfillment of needs to children’s happiness and emotional closeness:

“When her needs are met, she is very happy. She comes into my lap and gives me kisses and also dances.” (Mother 2)

However, not all mothers supported immediate fulfillment of children's demands. Some emphasized the importance of teaching patience and self-control:

"I tell him that I will buy it for him later." (Mother 3)

Additionally, a belief emerged that unmet needs could lead to negative behavior:

"If you do not meet children's needs, they will misbehave in the future." (Mother 9)

These findings suggest that while fulfilling children's demands is widely perceived as an expression of care, mothers differ in how they balance responsiveness with discipline. Educational background appears to influence this balance, with more educated mothers more likely to introduce limits and delayed gratification.

3.4 Importance of obedience and educational behavior

Obedience and engagement in educational activities were strongly valued by mothers and closely linked to their emotional responses. Mothers expressed satisfaction and pride when children followed instructions and completed academic tasks.

One mother shared: *"When my daughter doesn't eat or do her homework, it makes me feel really angry. But when she eats and completes her homework on time, I feel really happy."* (Mother 2)

Similarly: *"When my son does not complete his homework, it makes me upset. However, I feel glad when he follows the rules and finishes his work."* (Mother 11)

These responses indicate that children's compliance with routines and academic expectations contributes to mothers' sense of fulfillment and emotional well-being.

Differences were observed across sociocultural groups. Mothers with higher educational backgrounds tended to emphasize structured academic habits and homework completion, whereas mothers with less formal education focused more on general obedience, daily routines, and respectful behavior. Despite these differences, the value placed on obedience remained consistent across all participants.

3.5 Social interaction with guests and relatives

Mothers highlighted children's social behavior as an important indicator of good upbringing. Behaviors such as greeting guests, showing respect, and engaging in polite conversation were widely emphasized.

One mother described her child's behavior: *"He first greets the guest, sits on their lap, and starts to speak about his curiosities."* (Mother 11)

Another noted: *"He is very curious about guests and always wants to know who they are and where they came from."* (Mother 8)

These examples illustrate how children's interactions with others reflect both social learning and cultural expectations.

While higher-educated mothers encouraged curiosity and communication, less educated mothers emphasized politeness and respect. Despite these variations, all mothers viewed appropriate social interaction as a critical component of child development and a reflection of effective parenting.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Discipline as a strategy for behavioral control

Results from this study have been used to demonstrate different methods of discipline that mothers in Nepal use when rearing their children. Some Nepalese mothers utilize motivators; others rely on verbal punishment as well as physical punishment from time-to-time. The differences between the two groups illustrate that there are different methods of discipline amongst the same family unit.

Different methods of discipline can be demonstrated in the context of Baumrind's parenting style theory; this theory suggests that parenting is structured around two dimensions: responsiveness (warmth) and demandingness/controlling (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Mothers that use yelling or corporal punishment to get children to comply demonstrate authoritarian style parenting. An authoritarian parent adheres to a strict discipline model and attempts to control their child's behavior. Mothers who provide support and encouragement for their children to behave have an authoritative

style of parenting, whereby warmth is accompanied by reasonable expectations of their children. Consistent with our findings, research has shown that using physical or emotionally coercive methods of discipline leads to increased incidence of behaviour problems and emotional distress in children (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Furthermore, with positive supportive parenting styles, children are more successful with behavioral self-regulation and have improved socio-emotional competency (McMahon *et al.*, 2025). These findings demonstrate that discipline practices among Nepali mothers are shaped by both traditional cultural prospects of obedience and emergent perceptions on positive parenting.

4.2 Affection and emotional bonding

Mothers convey love primarily through sharing physical proximity, spending time together with children, and being emotionally engaged with a child. Activities such as hugging, kissing, talking to and playing with children were often spoken about as techniques to strengthen the emotional bond with a child and create an atmosphere of trust. According to parenting theory, these behaviors fall within the realm of the parent's accountability and, therefore, represent warmth, emotional support and caregiver sensitivity (Baumrind, 1991). The degree to which a parent exhibits high levels of responsiveness is related to the establishment of secure attachment and a healthy emotional development in their child (Bornstein, 2012).

Some have found empirical evidence that children raised in emotionally supportive families demonstrate better social adjustment, self-esteem and emotional regulation than children from non-emotionally supportive families (McMahon *et al.*, 2025; Sanders *et al.*, 2014). In Nepal, a collectivist society, the expression of affection and closeness may also significantly contribute to family cohesion and interdependence. As a result, the statement from mothers that “bonding through emotion” is a culturally and developmentally significant aspect of parenting promoting children's psychological wellness.

4.3 Fulfilling children's demands as an expression of care

The mothers in this study noted that their fulfillment of their children's wishes demonstrated maternal care and love. Some participants reported that they had to sacrifice other forms of spending in order to meet the demands of their children to promote child happiness and compliance. The maternal behaviors can be viewed from a theoretical lens of permissive parenting (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) characterized by high responsiveness (nurturing) and low levels of behavioral regulation. In contrast, our study found that mothers who utilized the parenting style of being both nurturing and setting limits (authoritative parenting) demonstrated perseverance in meeting the demands of their children through delaying purchases or providing rationales for not meeting the request. Similarly, parental responsiveness has been found to have a positive influence on children's emotional health, however, too much indulgence, without providing guidance, may hinder the self-regulation and behavioral development of children (McMahon *et al.*, 2025). In addition, studies have shown that children are more socially competent and adaptive if they are parented in a balanced way, which consists of emotional support provided with appropriate boundaries (Bornstein, 2012; Sanders *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, these findings demonstrate the manner in which mothers attempt to fulfill their children's emotional needs while also managing the constraints of family life.

4.4 Importance of obedience and academic behavior

According to the study results, children's obedience is closely connected to their mother's emotional experience in meeting their academic responsibility (e.g., completing homework) and how a mother feels about her child meeting the expectations of her (i.e., following parent direction). Based on mothers' reports, they express satisfaction, happiness, and emotional security when their child meets the expectations associated with homework completion and disciplined study habits; as such, they often express frustration or anger when their child fails to comply with such expectations. Research on parental involvement indicates that when parents provide direction for completing homework, monitor their child's study routine, and communicate their expectations regarding their child's educational responsibilities; then the child will have a greater motivation and

success academically (Navarro, 2015; Eccles & Allan Wigfield, 2020). These parenting practices also help children develop self-regulation and persistence toward learning experiences (Poudel, 2024).

The findings also show that there are subtle differences in different social class groups in the way mothers interpret what obedience is and how children behave academically. Compared to mothers with lower caste status from Dalit and Janajati communities, who often do not have education, mothers from higher caste and higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have greater expectations of their children completing their homework, have disciplined study habits, and are more organized in their academic routines. Conversely, mothers with limited education from Dalit and Janajati community view obedience and basic academic skill development in the context of daily living skills, respectful behavior, and practical discipline. These differences suggest that the expectations on parents have been influenced by the parent's larger social and cultural context, which influence the educational opportunities of the parent and child (Poudel, 2024).

4.5 Social interaction and cultural socialization

Another major result of this investigation was the significance that mothers assigned to their children's skills in interacting appropriately with relatives and other guests. Mothers took as evidence of child's successful upbringing all of the following behaviors: welcoming people to their homes, exhibiting appropriate social protocols (e.g., greeting visitors, using polite language, and demonstrating interest in the visitors), and maintaining a respectful relationship with others in their homes. As they do so, children are learning appropriate ways to communicate and understand how to respond to others, based on the observations they make of how the adults in their families communicate with others (Bornstein, 2022). Research on family socialization continues to support the idea that supportive family structures that promote communication and respectful relationships are important to children's development of social skills and social competence (McMahon *et al.*, 2025). In Nepal, children's interaction with their elders and other guests is important to their socialization, as it provides them with cultural values learned through family socialization and establishes the child's family as having the

appropriate upbringing (Keller, 2018). Through their socially accepted behaviors such as greeting visitors, using polite language, and being attentive, children learn culturally appropriate social values and are positively affected by their families (Guralnick, 1994).

4.6 Strength and limitation

This study's strength is its qualitative phenomenological methodology, which gave a thorough knowledge of mothers' experiences with punishment, tenderness, and addressing their children's needs. However, study is limited to a single district and exclusion of other caregivers such as father or grandparents, restrict generalizability. Despite these limitations, the findings provide useful insights on culturally based parenting methods in Nepal.

4.7 Implications

This study provides evidence that there is a lack of parenting programs aimed at providing positive discipline, fostering a bond between parent and child, and developing a child's academic and social skills. It is important that any type of intervention be culturally based and that interventions take into consideration a family's values, family structure, and the mother's education level as they relate to parenting styles and practices in Nepal. Children develop social skills and an understanding of their culture through respectful interactions with relatives and visitors outside of the home. Future research should include a broader range of caregivers in order to create culturally appropriate strategies that will promote comprehensive growth for young children.

5 CONCLUSION

The findings show that rather than following a single parenting style, Nepali mothers tended to blend discipline, affection, and responsiveness situationally while interaction of social culture belief with their preschool children. Some mothers apply either physical or fear-based punishment and other prefer emotionally close, affection and supportive environment as a parental means to child rearing and caring. For many

mothers, meeting a child's needs reflects love and care, whereas more educated mothers often introduce limits to foster patience and self-regulation. In all sociocultural groups, Nepali mothers strongly valued the children's obedience, respectful behavior, and appropriate social interaction. This study highlights to set the culturally responsive parenting frameworks that could spot both local values and changing global perspectives in early childhood development.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Prakash Sharma: Conceptualization and collection of information, perform the analysis, project administration, software, validation, visualization, writing- original draft, writing- review and editing.

DATA AVAILABILITY

All essential details of this study are included in the manuscript. However, upon reasonable request, the principal author can provide certain identified data fields.

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