

Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting Styles: A Narrative Literature Review

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Abstract

The intergenerational transmission of parenting styles has become a central area of research over recent decades within the disciplines of developmental psychology and family sociology. The aim of this narrative literature review is to synthesise the findings of empirical studies published on this topic, with a particular focus on the intergenerational continuity and discontinuity of parenting styles, as well as the mediator and moderator variables influencing transmission processes. The review highlights that parenting styles demonstrate a moderate degree of generational stability; however, significant variability can be observed depending on different parenting dimensions, the gender of the parents, and the cultural context.

Keywords: parenting, parenting style, intergenerational transmission, generational continuity, literature review

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Introduction

Research into parenting styles is built upon the pioneering work of Diana Baumrind, who identified two fundamental dimensions of parental behaviour: responsiveness (warmth, acceptance) and demandingness (control, supervision) (Baumrind, 1991). The combination of these two dimensions yields four basic parenting styles: the authoritative (high warmth and high control), the authoritarian (low warmth and high control), the permissive (high warmth and low control), and the neglectful (low warmth and low control) parenting style (Baumrind, 1991; Buri, 1991).

Parenting practices have a significant impact not only on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development and self-regulation skills, but also on their subsequent mental health. Consequently, understanding the factors that influence parents' rearing strategies is of paramount importance. One of the most critical factors is the parents' own childhood experiences, namely the manner in which they themselves were raised by their own parents (Belsky, 1984).

Intergenerational studies examine the extent to which and the mechanisms through which parenting styles are transmitted from one generation to the next. A portion of parental behaviour exhibits continuity in the subsequent generation. In the form of a narrative literature review, this study examines the phenomenon of the generational transmission of parenting styles discussed in

the international literature between 2007 and 2026, emphasising the sociological, developmental psychological, and cultural dimensions of the concept. The objective of this literature review is to summarise the key findings of this research area, identify consistent patterns and existing contradictions, and highlight future research directions.

Method

Utilising the method of a narrative literature review, the aim of this study is to review and synthesise the literature data and knowledge concerning the topic (Booth, 2016) by taking into account relevant international studies. Related scientific publications were gathered from electronic databases (Elicit, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate) within the fields of sociology and psychology. The search keywords were as follows: parenting, parenting style, generation. During the selection of the literature, a relevance-based sampling principle was adopted, with particular attention paid to identifying the most relevant articles with the highest professional standing suggested by the search engines.

Due to the narrative nature of the review, the purpose of the selection was not to compile a comprehensive, exhaustive database mapping, but rather to integrate studies that best represent the contextual and theoretical diversity of the topic. To this end, efforts were made during the selection process to ensure geographical and cultural diversity; thus, the analysed articles encompass samples from several countries and different continents (such as Europe, Asia, and Australia), thereby allowing for a transcultural examination of intergenerational effects.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Social Learning Theory

According to social learning theory, children acquire behaviours through observation and experience that help them adapt to the family environment (Bandura & Walters, 1963). When these children become parents themselves, they tend to repeat these learned patterns when raising their own children. Alongside direct role-modelling, reinforcement processes also play a crucial role: coercive, mutually escalating cycles of argument between parent and child, for example, can intensify the aggressive behaviour of both parties.

Attachment Theory

Based on the work of Bowlby, the quality of the early parent-child relationship determines the child's internal working models, which subsequently influence their own parenting behaviour (Bowlby, 2008). Individuals with secure attachment are more likely to become warm, sensitive parents, whereas insecurely attached individuals find it more difficult to establish optimal parenting practices.

Theories of Ecological and Family Context

Dynamic systems theories emphasise that parental behaviour is shaped not only by past experiences but also by the immediate social environment. The parenting style of the partner, the quality of the marital relationship, social support, and socioeconomic circumstances all influence the extent to which parents reproduce or modify the parenting practices experienced from their own parents (Geeraerts et al., 2025).

Statistical Indicators of the Transmission of Parenting Styles

The preservation of parenting patterns across generations has also been confirmed by a large-scale, comprehensive meta-analysis that aggregated 408 statistical effect size values from 51 publications across 24 independent studies (Geeraerts et al., 2025). The investigation concluded that the inter-generational agreement of parenting styles is low on average, but statistically clearly demonstrable, meaning it is significant. In everyday language, this implies that although there is a real, provable link between grandparents' parenting styles and parents' own practices, the past family pattern is by no means entirely deterministic—parents are largely capable of choosing their own independent path of upbringing.

The research also highlighted that immense diversity (heterogeneity) can be observed among the results of individual studies, and indeed among families; the degree of transmission varies from family to family. More detailed (moderation) analyses conducted to explore the reasons showed that the adoption of patterns is not uniform across all areas of upbringing. Emotional attitudes experienced from first-generation parents (grandparents)—such as warmth, acceptance, or rejecting, hostile attitudes (negativity)—were transmitted much more strongly to the next generation than more structured parenting methods, such as supporting the child's independence (autonomy support) or establishing family rule systems (structuring) (Geeraerts et al., 2025).

Finally, the study brought to light an important gender difference, as the parenting style of mothers—or cases where both parents shared the same principles—formed a significantly stronger chain across generations than when only paternal parenting practices were examined. This suggests that maternal patterns in childhood (or a unified front by parents) leave a deeper impression on subsequent adult parental functioning.

Transmission of the Warmth Dimension

Research confirms that warm, accepting parenting behaviour exhibits stability across generations. Parents who experienced high levels of emotional warmth and care during childhood are more likely to display similar positive parenting behaviour towards their own children. According to a Spanish three-generation study by Garcia and colleagues (2020), parental warmth shows an increasing trend across generations: parents employ more affection and reasoning, whilst displaying less indifference.

Transmission of the Control and Negativity Dimension

Negative, hostile parenting behaviour also demonstrates intergenerational continuity. A study by He and colleagues (2020) on a rural Chinese sample showed that grandparents' rejecting parenting style is positively and significantly linked to parents' hostile parenting practices. An important finding is that this relationship was mediated by the parents' mental health status—specifically depression, anxiety, and stress.

Generational Changes in Parenting Practices

Sociological and psychological examinations of the family suggest that parenting styles are not static but undergo significant historical changes. In recent decades, a general trend has been observable both globally and domestically: supportive, emotionally warm, and democratic parenting practices (striving for equality instead of authoritarianism) are increasingly gaining ground, whilst authoritarian (based on unquestionable authority), rigid, and punishment-centred methods are gradually declining.

Garcia and colleagues (2020) tracked this process precisely by examining three consecutive generations: grandparents, parents, and grandchildren. Their research demonstrated that along the generational arc, there is a marked increase in so-called inductive discipline, meaning the use of reasoning, explaining rules, and discussion. In parallel, the presence of physical coercion and corporal punishment is drastically decreasing.

One of the most important findings of the study was that the largest and most striking generation gap emerged precisely in the use of physical punishment. While corporal punishment was still a socially widely accepted, established tool of discipline in the grandparents' generation, this method is rapidly disappearing from the toolkit of today's parents—owing to tightening legal regulations and psychological awareness-raising. This trend proves that although parents tend to copy their own parents' patterns, the modernisation of social norms can override poor family reflexes and initiate visible progress in the culture of child-rearing.

Mediating and Moderating Factors

Mediators

To understand the internal mechanisms of intergenerational transmission, it is essential to identify mediating factors (so-called mediator variables) that show the pathways through which childhood experiences shape subsequent adult parenting behaviour. One of the most important of these mediating channels is externalising behavioural problems. If a child is raised in a cold or rejecting environment, the risk of conduct difficulties, aggression, and antisocial manifestations in their environment increases significantly. These early, adolescent behavioural problems extend into adulthood and become entrenched, and when the individual becomes a parent themselves, they

react back almost automatically onto their own parenting practices, resulting in a more tense parenting style (Conger et al., 2002).

Alongside overt behavioural problems, internal psychological difficulties, namely internalising problems, also play a major mediating role in this process. This is highlighted by the research of He and colleagues (2020), which proved that grandparents' rejecting treatment significantly increases the risk of mental health problems—primarily depression, anxiety, and daily stress—in the growing child. The resulting adult psychological vulnerability and internal tension then lead directly to the application of more hostile, impatient parenting practices towards their own children.

Beyond mood and behavioural factors, more stable personality traits can also alter the generational chain of parenting patterns. A study by Kitamura and colleagues (2009) on a Japanese sample revealed that although some parenting styles are transmitted through direct imitation from grandparents to parents, this relationship is partially mediated by the parents' inherent trait of cooperativeness. Interestingly, this personality-related mediating effect was only demonstrable for fathers in the study. This indicates that boys growing up in a rejecting environment become less cooperative in adulthood, and it is this personality change that ultimately predisposes them to more rigid, colder paternal involvement.

Moderators

In addition to mediating mechanisms, the strength of the generational chain is influenced by several modifying factors, known as moderator factors, which determine the conditions under which past patterns are more or less likely to be passed on. One of the most vital filters is the gender of the parent themselves. Indeed, meta-analytic results indicate that the parenting style of mothers, or cases where both parents share the same principles, shows substantially stronger intergenerational continuity than when only paternal parenting practices are examined (Geeraerts et al., 2025). Interestingly, however, early maternal influences also affect fathers, as a UK longitudinal study by Madden and colleagues (2015) pointed out that grandmothers' past emotional warmth significantly predicted adult fathers' positive parenting behaviour, both in terms of positive responsiveness and cognitive stimulation, whereas grandfathers' parenting style did not show such a significant association.

Alongside the parents' gender, the current family environment, particularly the partner's influence and the quality of the relationship, also plays a fundamental moderating role. A supportive, emotionally warm spouse or partner, or their adaptive parenting style, can act as a major protective factor capable of breaking the transmission of negative family patterns. Research suggests that the intergenerational transmission of a harsh, rejecting parenting style suffered in childhood becomes significant primarily when the current partner's supportive behaviour is low, leaving the parent alone with their tensions (Conger et al., 2002).

This is complemented by resources appearing at the individual level, such as parental self-efficacy and the use of active coping strategies. High parental self-efficacy—the belief that the parent can successfully manage parenting situations—and conscious problem-solving exert a compensating,

buffering effect. Parents with such psychological capacities are more likely to develop positive, supportive parenting practices despite their own difficult childhoods, successfully overriding trans-generational vulnerability (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Belsky, 1984).

Finally, the stability of parenting patterns is further nuanced by the child's age and the methodology of the studies. Recent meta-analytic data show that the agreement and correlation between grandparental and parental parenting styles are substantially stronger when parenting is measured with respect to younger children (Geeraerts et al., 2025). Furthermore, the measurement method can be a significant confounding factor: statistical effect sizes were demonstrably smaller in studies where the same person reported on both their own parents' (\$G1\$) and their own (\$G2\$) parenting style, and a similar reduction was observed in the case of higher attrition rates during longer-term studies (Geeraerts et al., 2025).

Cultural and Social Context

Macro-level cultural values fundamentally determine which parenting practices become accepted and successful in a given society. Modern social science research draws a sharp distinction in this regard between individualistic cultures that promote personal independence and collectivistic cultures that prioritise community cohesion and obedience. In individualistic cultures, the warm but firmly bounded authoritative parenting style traditionally proves to be the most effective. Conversely, in certain collectivistic societies, more rigid, authoritarian parenting elements do not entail such severe negative psychological consequences for the child as in the Western world, since strictness there is viewed as a natural sign of care and alignment with cultural norms (Baumrind, 1991).

These cultural values themselves continuously evolve throughout history, as illustrated by a three-generation Iranian study by Bidjari and Zahmatkesh (2011). Their research showed that the presence of individual-centred, individualistic values increased gradually from generation to generation within families, although this modernising change did not reach a statistically significant level. At the same time, the development of community-centred, collectivistic values closely followed the country's political history, as collectivism showed a significant increase from the first generation to the second—which coincided with the period of the Islamic Revolution and the reinforcement of religious-communitarian values at the state level. However, upon reaching the youngest, third generation, these collectivistic values decreased significantly once again, indicating the global openness of younger cohorts and their departure from traditional patterns.

The shaping power of the cultural environment and the limitations of classic Western models were also confirmed by the research of Garcia and colleagues (2020) in Spain. The study conducted in the Mediterranean culture led to the surprising result that the permissive parenting style, characterised by high emotional warmth but a low degree of strictness, resulted in psychosocial adjustment among children that was at least as favourable as—and in certain indicators even better than—the authoritative style considered exemplary. Spanish children and young people growing up with a permissive background reported the development of a more positive self-concept, higher life satisfaction, and overall levels of happiness. This discovery emphatically points out that the

effectiveness and generational transmission of parenting styles cannot be examined on the basis of a universal template; the impact and perception of parenting practices always acquire their true meaning within the specific cultural context of the given society.

Cultural Background and Generational Epoch Shifts in Child-Rearing

The development of parental patterns is significantly shaped by the broader cultural background and immigration experiences alongside the immediate family environment. A study conducted in Australia by Zervides and Knowles (2007) compared immigrant families of Greek origin with native Anglo-Saxon-Australian families. The results showed that respondents with a Greek-Australian background experienced substantially stricter, more authoritarian upbringing from their parents as children than their Anglo-Saxon peers. At the same time, generational change is well indicated by the fact that despite the strictness brought from the family past, second-generation parents from both cultural groups already followed a much more cooperative, supportively firm parenting practice with their own children than they themselves had experienced at home. Regarding gender roles, however, a traditional division of labour remained, as in both examined generations, fathers were more characterised by a stricter, more demanding approach, whilst mothers tended to represent a supportive, emotionally responsive, and explanatory parenting style.

The intergenerational development of parenting values and goals closely reflects macro-level social, economic, and technological changes, which is also supported by empirical research conducted among Polish mothers by Agnieszka Szymańska (2024). Using semantic analysis and singular value decomposition, the author provides an accurate picture of how parenting priorities transformed from the Baby Boomer and Generation X eras through Millennial mothers to the youngest, Generation Alpha. The research highlights that the parenting goals of earlier generations were largely determined by the structural expectations of their time, yet significant differences emerged in the order of importance of values according to the gender of the parents.

In raising their daughters, Baby Boomer and Generation X fathers highly preferred independence, obedience, and diligence, while courage and responsibility, as paternal values, also showed a distinct, though less dominant, pattern. This indicates that fathers traditionally shaped their children to cope with challenges and strictly follow rules. In contrast, mothers of that era, alongside the universal support of independence, focused firmly on intellectual and emotional development, meaning that intelligence, education, and empathy appeared prominently for them. Mothers thus strove for high levels of education and emotional responsiveness to prepare their daughters for the complex demands of the modern world.

The most important finding of the study is that adult daughters belonging to the Millennial generation, who are now mothers themselves, adopted and significantly transformed the patterns received from their parents, adapting them to the demands of the present day. Independence, as a core value, remained the most dominant element across all generational patterns, indicating that raising children for independent decision-making universally spans across cohorts. In raising Generation

Alpha children, Millennial mothers strive on the one hand to dismantle gender stereotypes, and on the other hand to ensure more balanced emotional and social development, yet goals still show a specific duality according to the child's gender.

In the case of their sons, Millennial mothers prioritise practical skills and autonomy, particularly supporting independent decision-making and diligence, which is strongly complemented by the encouragement of creativity and innovation. Boys' social skills and emotional world are fine-tuned with values such as empathy, honesty treated as a moral foundation, optimism, faith, and sensitivity, whilst their independence is supported by strengthening self-confidence.

Conversely, when raising their daughters, building strength of character becomes the primary goal, so assertiveness, courage, and firm self-confidence receive a prominent role to serve the girls' self-advocacy in today's society. Empathy is also highly emphasised for female children, whilst the traditional intellectual pressure and the pursuit of education at all costs characteristic of previous generations recede somewhat against the development of emotional intelligence.

Based on data from Szymańska (2024), intergenerational transmission is thus not a mechanical process but a reflexive adaptation during which parents respond to changing social realities. While fathers of previous generations emphasised structure and rule-following, and mothers emphasised intellect, Millennial mothers strive for a synthesis of rational and emotional upbringing. In the upbringing of Generation Alpha, a dissolution of rigid gender roles can thus be observed, as emotional openness and creativity appear in boys, while assertiveness, self-confidence, and internal strength of character, previously more characteristic of paternal patterns, become defining for girls.

Generational Cohorts

For a deeper understanding of the historical development of parenting values and practices, embedding generational cohorts into a theoretical framework is essential. Székely (2020) points out that the legitimacy of the generational approach in thinking about youth is primarily justified by its ability to reflect on the key question, namely, what the new generations are like and how they shape the future. Differences between generations stem fundamentally not from age-related characteristics but from differences in lived socialisation experiences, which, if sustained over time, define the fundamental character of a generation.

While the family functioning as the primary socialisation medium and the school as the secondary medium have remained essentially unchanged for a long time, the expansion of tertiary (leisure spaces) and quaternary (the virtual spaces of the information society) socialisation media in recent decades has fundamentally reshaped the profile of newer generations. Székely (2020) emphasises that in the case of younger generations (thus Generations Y and Z), media aspects and the virtual spaces of digital culture are intensely present among character-forming factors, forming a kind of global standard that blurs previous cultural and socioeconomic boundaries. This socialisation background driven by macro-level technological and social changes explains why different cohorts define radically different priorities and parenting goals when becoming parents.

Research clearly confirms that Baby Boomer and Generation X parents prioritised markedly different social priorities and parenting goals when raising their children than their millennial peers who became parents later (Maribeth et al., 2024). As illustrated by the previously detailed data from Szymańska (2024), millennial mothers already focus much more on skills responding to the needs of the modern era when raising their Generation Alpha children, whilst highlighting patterns that give internal fortitude, such as courage and responsibility, as a heritage from their own fathers' parenting past.

The global and cross-cultural nature of this generational shift is well demonstrated by an Indian study by Faraz, Adam, and Shahnawaz (2015). The researchers utilized a mixed-methods approach to shed light on subtle movements between generations in a traditionally more collectivistic society. Although, based on quantifiable quantitative data, mothers belonging to both the older and younger generations primarily applied a balanced, supportively firm parenting style—and no substantial difference showed between them—the deeper qualitative analysis already surfaced the true generational shift. Based on interview data, newer generation parents visibly grant greater freedom to their children despite cultural roots, apply decidedly fewer punitive tools, and, breaking with the rigidity of previous eras, support the unfolding of individual independence much more consciously.

The Relationship Between Permissive Parenting Style and Self-Confidence

Research examining the personality development of young adults pays increasing attention to how more flexible parental attitudes affect the self-concept and social success of the latest generations. An Indonesian study by Khaira and Basaria (2025) explicitly mapped the relationship between a freer, permissive parenting style and youth self-confidence among Generation Z individuals. The investigation conducted on a sample of 386 people revealed a clear, statistically significant positive correlation between the two factors. This result highlights that a permissive parental approach, which places the child's own decisions and independence at the centre, specifically supports the development of healthy self-confidence.

Interestingly, all examined areas of self-confidence—such as security experienced in social relationships, confidence at school/work, and self-acceptance—moved closely in tandem with a supportive, freedom-granting parental background. Examining gender differences, the researchers found that Generation Z men generally possessed significantly higher self-confidence than women.

The importance of the balance between excessive strictness and freedom is also supported by a Pakistani study by Masood and weaknesses (2026), who investigated the long-term behavioural consequences of strict, authoritarian, as well as permissive parenting styles among Generation Z university students. The results pointed to significant differences, as the majority of young people raised with cold and demanding upbringing, 72.2%, openly showed aggressive behaviour in their daily lives, and only 27.8% of them became truly self-assured, confident adults.

In contrast, the proportion of behavioural outcomes was much healthier and more balanced among university students raised with permissive upbringing, as nearly half of them (51.1%) became explicitly confident individuals with high self-esteem, whilst the proportion of aggressive reactions fell to 48.9%. Statistical analyses thus confirmed a significant and direct link between childhood parental treatment and adult behaviour patterns.

Taken together, these Asian data warn that a major modernisation process is taking place in the upbringing of Generation Z even in traditionally more collectivistic, authority-respecting societies. The results prove that rigid and punishment-based parental control often breeds helplessness and suppressed anger by adulthood, whilst a more permissive atmosphere that respects the child's autonomy—even if it sometimes sets fewer boundaries—provides a more secure foundation for the development of stable internal self-esteem and assertive, non-violent presence.

The Mediating Role of Personality

The transmission of family patterns occurs not merely through copying specific parenting techniques, but also through shaping deeper, more stable personality structures. This subtle intertwining was examined by a three-generation Japanese study by Kitamura and colleagues (2009), which mapped the intergenerational migration of innate temperamental traits as well as learned character traits. The results highlighted that grandparents' parenting style affects parents in two ways: on the one hand, it serves as a direct model (meaning the parent simply imitates what they saw as a child), but on the other hand, it also operates through an indirect channel. This indirect effect is realised through the parents' adult cooperativeness.

However, this character-based mediating role showed a highly fascinating gender specificity, as it was statistically demonstrable exclusively for fathers. This psychological mechanism means that if a boy receives cold or rejecting upbringing from his own parents as a child, it negatively shapes his developing character: he becomes more distrustful in adulthood, and his cooperativeness decreases. It is this altered, more closed personality trait that subsequently makes empathy difficult for him as an adult, almost „shoving” him into a stricter, more rejecting paternal parenting style. In the case of mothers, this indirect chain through personality was not verifiable, suggesting that women's parenting style is more strongly influenced by other external social or emotional factors besides their stable personality traits.

The research also clearly proved that both maternal and paternal parenting styles leave a deep impression on children's personality development. The temperament and character of the children participating in the study showed a moderate but statistically clear similarity (correlation) with the corresponding personality dimensions of their parents. This moderate co-movement provides a dual lesson, as on the one hand it provides solid evidence that personality traits and psychological makeup are transmitted to some extent from generation to generation in the family, but on the other hand it also points out that this heritage is not rigid destiny—children's own uniqueness and broader environmental influences also receive ample space in the ultimate unfolding of personality.

Practical Applications: Breaking the Generational Chain of Parenting Patterns

Deeper knowledge of the cross-generational continuity of parental patterns carries highly important practical implications for developing preventive and intervention programmes. Since parenting styles demonstrably tend to be inherited from generation to generation, interventions developing conscious parenting skills function as a type of long-term investment. Indeed, a successful early parenting training session not only improves the current parent-child relationship but also potentially exerts a positive, protective effect on the development of unborn grandchildren, thereby exerting its beneficial effect across multiple generations (Dishion & Patterson, 2015; Sanders, 2008).

Clinical and family support experiences clearly indicate that targeted support for parents' mental health is one of the primary keys in this process. Since unrecognised and untreated adult depression, chronic anxiety, and daily stress are proven to be the main fuels for transmitting negative, tense parenting patterns, support programmes cannot ignore the psychological state of caregivers. Effective preventive services must therefore connect the teaching of practical parenting skills with the screening and reinforcement of parents' mental well-being already in the earliest stage of child development—even during pregnancy (Lovejoy et al., 2000).

This focal point is supported by the results of Garcia and colleagues (2020), according to which providing parental warmth and emotional security acts as a universal protective factor for children's healthy psychological development (psychosocial adjustment). In contrast, cold upbringing without emotional responsiveness consistently results in poorer quality of life and behavioural problems across generations. Practical interventions must therefore be built primarily on expressing genuine emotional warmth, strengthening empathy, and tightening the secure parent-child attachment.

The meta-analysis by Geeraerts and colleagues (2025) provides further guidance for professionals in setting precise emphases. The research data highlighted that among various areas of parental behaviour, emotional acceptance, as well as overt rejection and hostility (negativity), show the strongest stability between generations. Consequently, parenting support programmes and family therapy processes that explicitly focus on these deeply rooted emotional and temperamental dimensions—and help parents become aware of and then override the rejecting patterns brought from their own childhood—will be able to break negative family cycles with much greater efficiency.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the rich theoretical background behind research into intergenerational parenting styles, existing empirical studies possess numerous methodological limitations that are essential to consider when designing future research. Retrospective self-report measurements applied in the current literature inherently carry memory biases, whilst cross-sectional studies providing the majority of data do not allow for drawing true causal conclusions due to their methodological nature.

The methodological meta-analysis by Geeraerts and colleagues (2025) pointed out another key shortcoming: statistical effect sizes were significantly smaller in cases where the same person reported on the parenting style of both generations. This phenomenon clearly points to the presence of common-informant bias, which can distort the picture obtained regarding the true stability of family patterns. Furthermore, studied samples are often highly homogeneous in terms of social class, economic background, and education, which limits the broader generalisability of the results.

In order to eliminate these methodological limitations, future research should demonstrate a methodological change of direction in several critical areas. On the one hand, it would be of paramount importance to involve substantially more diverse cultures and differing socioeconomic strata in the studies to get a more accurate picture of the universal or layer-specific nature of the patterns. On the other hand, alongside and complementing subjective self-report questionnaires, it would be necessary to apply observational measurements conducted in a natural environment to capture parent-child interactions more faithfully. The focus of research should likewise be expanded so that it does not merely place maternal parenting at the centre, but analyses the parenting style of both parents equally, including exploring the complex role of biological factors, such as genetic and epigenetic influences. Finally, for the success of practical interventions, an empirical evaluation of the long-term, cross-generational effectiveness of intervention programmes would be indispensable, along with tracking previously identified mediating factors—such as externalising and internalising behavioural problems—longitudinally across multiple time points in developmental psychology.

Conclusions

The intergenerational transmission of parenting styles is a complex, multi-factor process. Empirical research supports that a moderate degree of intergenerational continuity exists in both positive and negative parenting practices (Geeraerts et al., 2025). However, this stability is not deterministic, as numerous factors—such as partner support, parental mental health, active coping, and socio-cultural changes—can influence the extent to which parents reproduce or modify the parenting patterns experienced from their own parents.

Parental warmth and nurturing parenting show an increasing trend across generations in most studied cultures, while strict, punitive methods are declining. This trend is due partly to changing social norms and partly to an increase in parental awareness.

Applying an intergenerational perspective in designing parenting support interventions can help identify families at increased risk and enables achieving long-term, positive impacts spanning multiple generations.

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