

Title: Ethnic disadvantage or resilience? Parenting and children's socio-emotional challenges in the UK

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Short Abstract: Among the substantial body of literature on second-generation in Europe, little is known about the experiences of growing up as minority children. A growing phenomenon—the widespread use of digital devices among youths—has been linked to adverse socioemotional outcomes for adolescents, but this relationship is rarely explored among ethnic minority groups. Using the Youth and Parenting Questionnaires from *Understanding Society*, this study examines ethnic differences in parenting styles, measured through the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ), and children's social media use in relation to socioemotional health, assessed via the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for youths aged 10 to 15 across ethnic groups. Findings suggest several differences among ethnic groups. First, South Asian, Black, and Caribbean children spend fewer hours on social media during school days compared to White children. Second, they are subject to higher levels of parental control and lower levels of indulgence. Third, they report fewer socioemotional difficulties compared to White children. Fourth, gender differences in parenting are more pronounced among White parents, e.g., White mothers are more authoritative and less permissive than White fathers, while minority parents show greater similarity across genders. The next step of this project is to use mediation analysis to assess whether ethnic differences in SDQ scores among youths operate through (1) parenting styles, (2) conflicting parenting styles, or (3) social media usage. This research not only sheds light on the state minority resilience in the UK but also uses minority experiences as a lens to examine challenges of growing up in the digital age.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The widespread use of digital devices, such as smartphones and tablets, presents both opportunities and challenges for parents in the UK. While extensive usage has been linked to poorer socio-emotional health, little is known about how adolescent digital device usage varies across ethnic groups and whether this contributes to widening developmental and social disadvantages. In particular, many work focuses on social media consumption, a factor often explored alongside adolescent socio-emotional health trajectory in recent literature (e.g., Beeres et al., 2021; Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022). This project examines the relationship between social media consumption and adolescent well-being across ethnic groups using both the Youth and Main Questionnaires in Understanding Society. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do ethnic group differences in parenting (and conflicting parenting among mothers and fathers) and social media use relate to variations in youths' socioemotional health?
2. Does social media use or parenting style mediate—or moderate—the relationship between ethnicity and socioemotional outcomes among youths?

Understanding disparities in digital device usage is essential for addressing inter-ethnic differences in social outcomes such as well-being, child development, and socioemotional health. This research contributes to a wider conversation pertaining to targeted in-school and at-home interventions to procure equitable childhoods across groups in the UK.

Data & Methods

This study uses Understanding Society, also known as the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) (ISER, 2024), a panel study which covers all age groups within a household. Additionally, those aged 10 to 15 complete a Youth Questionnaire. Ethnic minority boost samples are collected in the study, enabling statistical analysis of major subgroups such as those of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African, and Caribbean descent. For this study, Irish White and Other White have been grouped with the largest White category (British, English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish). Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are grouped together, as are Africans and Caribbeans. Other than key variables such as the age of the youth, living with single or dual parents, and the index of multiple deprivation¹, several key covariates are examined in this study. The unweighted sample consists of 31,601 youths (12,902 unique individuals) from Waves 1 to 13 and 10,753 parents (7,734 unique individuals) from Waves 3 (when parenting style was first collected) to 13. SDQ of youths are measured in odd waves.

Social Media Consumption

¹ The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a composite measurement of deprivation calculated by a geographic unit called Lower Super Output Area (LSOA). It is derived from seven domains: income, employment, education, health, crime, access to services, and housing. They are calculated separately for those living in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland with a range of 1 to 5, with 1 being the most deprived 20%.

Two variables in the Youth Questionnaire convey the number of hours spent on social media—one specifying weekday consumption and one on weekend consumption. The number of hours spent on social media during weekends was not included in this study due to its lower variability and because weekday usage better reflects time competition with meaningful activities outside of the already few waking hours outside of schooling. The number of hours spent on social media on weekdays is measured in categories: none, less than an hour, 1-3 hours, 4-6 hours, and 7 or more hours. Since the first and the last categories hold relatively few cases (1-3%), categories have been simplified as: less than an hour, 1-3 hours, and 4 or more hours.

PSDQ

The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) is an instrument constructed with 133 survey items, answered by parents, forming factors that fall under Baumrind’s (1971) authoritative (demanding but warm and reasoned), authoritarian (demanding but emotionally distant and punitive), and permissive (low demand, high warmth) parenting typologies. A higher score indicates a higher adherence to the style.

Index of Multiple Deprivation

Outcome: SDQ

The SDQ was developed as a screening tool for behavioural and emotional problems in children and adolescents (Goodman, 1997), and it has been used as an instrument in predicting child psychological and psychiatric disorders (Goodman, 2001). This instrument contains 25 questions, designed to measure five constructs: emotional problems, conduct problems, peer problems, hyperactivity, and pro-social behaviour, in children and adolescents (Hansen, 2014). Higher scores in emotional and peer problems indicate increased risk for internalising problems, and higher scores in conduct problems and hyperactivity indicate higher risk for externalising problems.

Findings

Using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey HSD pairwise comparison of parenting styles across groups (shown in Table 1), I find that Indian, Black and Caribbean parents are on average less permissive than White parents. Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents are the least authoritative compared to all groups, and Blacks and Caribbeans are more authoritative than White parents. All groups are more authoritarian than White parents. This first step shows that in the UK, there is a significant difference between parenting styles across ethnic groups, with non-White groups generally less permissive, more authoritative or authoritarian than their white counterparts.

Table 1. Tukey HSD pairwise comparison of parenting styles among ethnic groups (adjusted p-value < 0.05 bolded)

	Permissive			Authoritative			Authoritarian		
	mean diff	lower	upper	mean diff	lower	upper	mean diff	lower	upper
Indian-White	-0.47	-0.90	-0.04	0.46	-0.60	1.53	1.36	0.76	1.96
Pakistani & Bangladeshi-White	-0.25	-0.58	0.08	-1.40	-2.22	-0.58	1.64	1.18	2.10
Black Carib-White	-0.61	-1.06	-0.17	2.59	1.47	3.70	1.20	0.57	1.82
Pakistani & Bangladeshi-Indian	0.22	-0.30	0.74	-1.86	-3.16	-0.56	0.28	-0.45	1.01
Black Carib-Indian	-0.15	-0.75	0.46	2.13	0.63	3.63	-0.17	-1.01	0.68
Black Carib-Pakistani & Bangladeshi	-0.36	-0.90	0.17	3.99	2.65	5.32	-0.44	-1.20	0.31

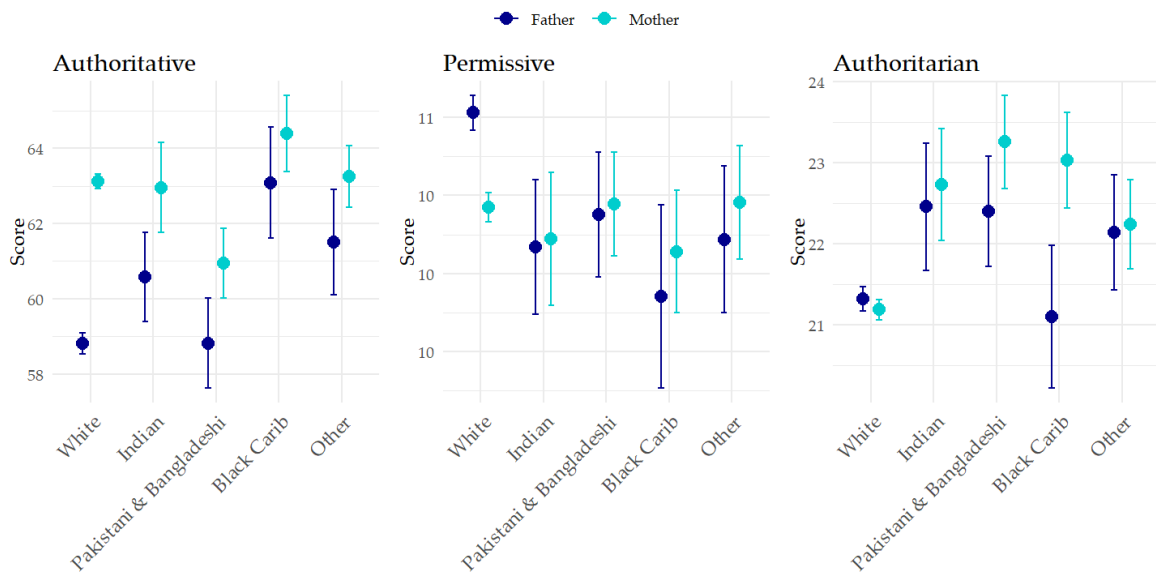


Figure 1. The mean (point) and standard deviation (error bar) of parenting styles by the sex of the parent and ethnic group

Relatedly, Figure 1 shows that once broken down by the sex of the parent, White mothers are similarly authoritative and permissive as mothers of other ethnicities, but White fathers show substantial differences with lower authoritativeness and higher permissiveness. Minority groups tend to show more similar parenting styles between mothers and fathers.

The youths themselves also differ in hours spent on social media on a weekday. Figure 2 shows that South Asian youths tend to spend less time on social media on a weekday, compared to White and Black and Caribbean youths. The difference across groups is statistically significant according to the chi-square test.

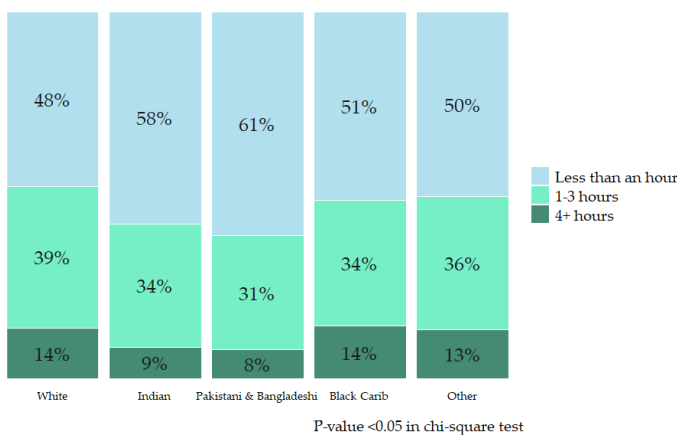


Figure 2. Proportion of social media usage by hours among youths by ethnic group

Next, I ran pooled linear regressions on SDQ scores on all dimensions (conduct, emotional, hyperactivity, and peer problems) and the total SDQ score separately, examining their association with all relevant covariates. Wave and the birth year of the youth are controlled but not shown. The

ethnic group variable is further interacted with the categories of numbers of hours spent on social media. Results show that the highest level of consumption, four or more hours on a weekday, is associated with more difficulties in three out of four domains: conduct, emotional problems, and hyperactivity. The association is stronger for Black and Caribbean youths in conduct, less so for emotional problems for Black, Caribbean, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi youths. There is no clear linkage between extensive social media usage and peer problems.

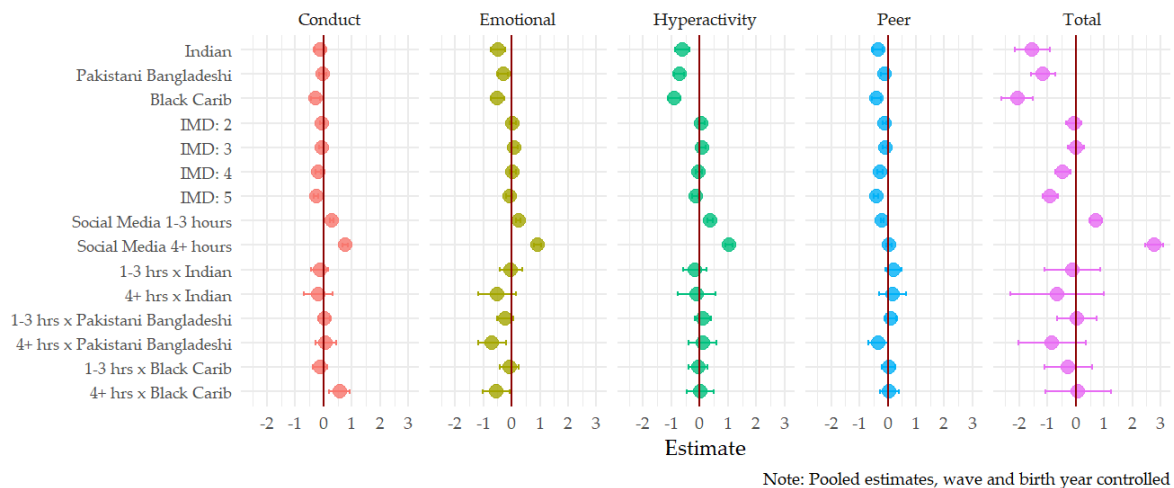


Figure 3. Pooled linear estimates of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire scores by key covariates

Discussion

This extended abstract shows descriptive analysis and basic regression analysis on key variables that may contribute to differences in SDQ among youths of different ethnic groups in the UK. First, parenting styles differ across ethnic groups, with minority parents more demanding of their youths (higher scores in authoritarian and authoritative styles) and a lower level of indulgence (permissive style) compared to White parents. A smaller proportion of South Asian youths go on social media for more than four hours a day. Lastly, extensive social media usage is associated with poorer socioemotional health in youths in the pooled estimation, particularly in hyperactivity, emotional problems, and conduct. The next step of this project is to answer the second research question using mixed effects models to examine changes in social media consumption across time and the use of mediation analysis to assess whether ethnic differences in SDQ scores among youths operate through mechanisms such as parenting styles, conflicting parenting styles, or different levels of social media usage. This research aims to shed light on the unique challenges of growing up in an increasingly digitalising age for children of diverse backgrounds.

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