

# MAPPING PARENTING STYLES AND PRACTICES AMONG SOMALI COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF HARGEISA, SOMALILAND

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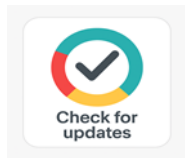
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Abstract	
<b>Keyword:</b> Parenting styles, authoritarian parenting, Somali families, cultural and religious influences, education and parenting	<p>This study examined parenting styles and practices among Somali parents in Hargeisa, Somaliland, with attention to cultural, religious, and educational influences. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining survey data from 120 parents with 14 semi-structured interviews. Parenting styles were assessed using Baumrind's typology, and thematic analysis provided qualitative insights. Quantitative results indicated that authoritarian parenting was most dominant (<math>M = 3.82</math>; 55%), followed by neglectful tendencies (<math>M = 3.55</math>; 18.3%). Authoritative parenting showed moderate presence (<math>M = 2.55</math>; 16.7%), while permissive parenting was least observed (<math>M = 2.09</math>; 10%). Qualitative findings reinforced these results, highlighting obedience, discipline, and sharaf (family honor) as central values. Islamic socialization emerged as the strongest contextual influence (<math>M = 3.89</math>), while socio-economic pressures (<math>M = 3.50</math>) and urban challenges (<math>M = 3.33</math>) complicated parenting, sometimes leading to neglect. Education moderated parenting approaches: parents with higher education demonstrated more authoritative tendencies, incorporating reasoning and emotional support, whereas less educated parents relied on authoritarian and neglectful practices. Overall, Somali parenting in Hargeisa reflects a transitional landscape—authoritarian norms remain dominant, but urbanization and education are fostering gradual shifts toward more balanced, child-centered approaches.</p>



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## Introduction

Parenting is a fundamental aspect of child development, significantly influencing cognitive, emotional, and social growth (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The ways in which parents interact with their children through discipline, emotional support, and behavioral guidance play a crucial role in shaping children's personality, academic success, and mental health outcomes (Sorkhabi & Mandara, 2013). Understanding

parenting is therefore essential for promoting healthy child development and well-being. Diana Baumrind's (1971) seminal research identified three primary parenting styles: authoritative (characterized by balanced warmth and control), authoritarian (strict and obedience-focused), and permissive (lenient and indulgent). This model was later expanded by Maccoby and Martin (1983) to include a fourth style: neglectful or uninvolved parenting, marked by minimal parental engagement. These parenting styles have been extensively studied, mostly in Western contexts, but their relevance and applicability across different cultural settings remain a subject of ongoing debate (Rudy & Grusec, 2006).

Parenting practices are deeply embedded within cultural norms and sociohistorical contexts (Bornstein, 2019). For example, collectivist societies often emphasize communal child-rearing, respect for elders, and interdependence, whereas individualist cultures tend to prioritize autonomy and self-expression (Kagitçibasi, 2012). These cultural dimensions shape not only parenting styles but also specific parenting behaviors and expectations.

In African and Muslim communities, including Somali society, parenting is strongly influenced by religious teachings, extended family networks, and traditional values that emphasize obedience, respect, and collective responsibility (Patel & Goodman, 2007). Somali parenting practices, in particular, reflect a blend of Islamic principles and clan-based social structures, which guide child-rearing and discipline methods (Abdi, 2010). However, despite the importance of these cultural factors, there is limited empirical research specifically exploring Somali parenting styles and practices, especially in urban settings like Hargeisa.

Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, represents a unique context where traditional Somali culture and Islamic values intersect with rapid urbanization and modernization. These dynamics create a complex environment in which parents negotiate between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary social changes. The city's socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and displacement, further influence family structures and parenting approaches (Patel & Goodman, 2007). Existing studies on Somali parenting have often been limited in scope or focused on diaspora communities, leaving a gap in understanding the lived realities of parents in Somaliland itself (Farah, 2015; Warsame, 2018). This study aims to address this gap by mapping parenting styles and practices in Hargeisa, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how culture, religion, and urbanization shape parenting in Somali society.

There is a significant need for scholarly understanding of parenting styles and practices within Somali communities, especially in Hargeisa, where urbanization and social change are rapidly evolving. Despite the central role of parenting in child development, empirical data on Somali parenting in Somaliland remains scarce. Much of the existing academic literature on Somali parenting has focused on diaspora communities, examining the experiences of families in North America or Europe (Farah, 2015; Warsame, 2018). This leaves a critical gap in understanding the lived realities of parents within Somaliland itself. Furthermore, little is known about how local cultural, religious, and urban factors interact to shape parenting behaviors in this specific context.

This study aims to fill that gap by exploring parenting styles and practices in Hargeisa, where urbanization and social change are transforming traditional family dynamics. This knowledge is essential for enabling policymakers, educators, and social workers to design effective family support and child development programs tailored to the community's actual needs.

## **Research Objectives**

The general purpose of the study is to explore and map parenting styles and practices among the Somali community in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The specific objectives are :

- ✓ To identify the most common parenting styles among Somali parents in Hargeisa.
- ✓ To examine how culture, religion, and urban life influence parenting practices.
- ✓ To explore differences in parenting styles based on parents' educational level.

## 2. Literature Review

Parenting is a central process in child development, shaping emotional, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. Research across cultures demonstrates that parenting styles vary significantly, reflecting broader social, cultural, and religious contexts. This review critically examines theoretical foundations, global perspectives, and Somali parenting practices, with emphasis on Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Baumrind's (1971) typology remains foundational, distinguishing authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved styles. Authoritative parenting—marked by warmth and control—has consistently been linked to positive outcomes such as self-esteem and academic achievement (Saleem et al., 2020). In contrast, authoritarian and uninvolved styles are associated with impulsivity, dependency, and poor performance. Attachment theory complements this framework, highlighting the role of secure caregiver-child bonds in emotional regulation (Aminayi et al., 2015). Bandura's (1977) social learning theory further underscores the importance of parental modeling, reinforcement, and punishment in shaping behavior. While these theories are widely applied globally, their integration into Somali parenting research remains limited, representing a gap in cross-cultural analysis.

Parenting practices differ across cultural contexts. In Western societies, authoritative parenting is often idealized, with emphasis on autonomy and reasoning, producing children with higher emotional intelligence and academic success (Carroll, 2022). Conversely, collectivist cultures in Asia and the Middle East favor authoritarian approaches, prioritizing obedience and respect. Importantly, authoritarian parenting in collectivist settings does not always yield negative outcomes; it may foster secure attachments where obedience is culturally normative (Dwairy et al., 2006). This suggests that parenting outcomes must be interpreted within cultural frameworks rather than through universal assumptions.

Somali parenting reflects a hybrid of Islamic principles, pastoralist traditions, and the socio-historical legacy of conflict. Islamic *tarbiyyah* emphasizes moral upbringing, Qur'anic instruction, and respect for elders, aligning with both authoritarian discipline and authoritative compassion. Pastoralist traditions reinforce responsibility and resilience, while experiences of conflict and displacement heighten parental emphasis on obedience and security. Urbanization and diaspora exposure, however, introduce more dialogical and supportive practices, creating tension between traditional authority and modern child-centered approaches (Patel & Goodman, 2007).

Despite rich cultural influences, Somali parenting research remains underdeveloped. Most studies focus on diaspora families, often generalizing Somali parenting as homogenous. This overlooks variations between rural and urban contexts, socio-economic classes, and regional differences. Moreover, mainstream psychological theories—Baumrind, Bandura, Bowlby—are rarely applied in Somali studies, limiting comparative insights. The lack of empirical work in Hargeisa is particularly striking, given its rapid urbanization and exposure to global norms. Without locally grounded data, interventions risk being culturally misaligned.

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine parenting styles and practices among Somali parents in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The quantitative component provided measurable insights into the prevalence of parenting styles, while the qualitative component offered deeper contextual understanding of how cultural, religious, and urban influences

shape parenting. This design was appropriate given the dual need to generate generalizable findings and to capture nuanced socio-cultural dynamics.

The target population comprised Somali parents residing in Hargeisa with children aged 0–18 years, ensuring coverage of diverse developmental stages. For the quantitative phase, a stratified random sampling method was employed to select 120 parents, representing different neighborhoods with varied socio-economic and urban characteristics. Stratification enhanced representativeness by capturing environmental diversity that affects parenting practices.

For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select approximately 20 parents for semi-structured interviews. This approach ensured inclusion of varied perspectives, particularly those reflecting differences in education, gender roles, and socio-economic status.

### Data Collection Instruments

Structured Questionnaire based on Baumrind’s parenting typology (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved) was administered face-to-face. Items also probed the influence of cultural, religious, and urban factors on parenting. Face-to-face administration minimized non-response bias and improved accuracy. Moreover, *semi-Structured Interviews* explored how Somali cultural beliefs, Islamic teachings, and urban realities influenced parental attitudes and practices. This method allowed participants to articulate lived experiences, providing rich qualitative data to complement survey findings.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Survey data were coded and analyzed using SPSS (version 23). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, percentages) identified dominant parenting styles. Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests examined associations between parenting styles and demographic variables. In addition to that, interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. Coding progressed from open coding to focused themes, highlighting recurring patterns related to cultural, religious, and urban influences.

Findings from both quantitative and qualitative strands were triangulated to enhance validity and provide a comprehensive understanding of parenting practices in Hargeisa.

## Findings

### Demographic Characteristics of Participants

A total of 120 parents participated in the study. Respondents varied in age, gender, marital status, and education level. Variables such as age, gender, marital status, and education level were included to capture a general profile of the respondents. The summarized information is provided in Table 4.1. below.

Table 4.1. Summarizes the Age, Gender, Marital Status, and Education Level of the Respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Age of Respondents	Below 25 years	10	8.3
	26–35 years	37	30.8
	36–45 years	41	34.2
	46 years and above	32	26.7
Gender	Male	47	39.2

	Female	73	60.8
Marital Status	Married	91	75.8
	Single/Divorced/Widowed	29	24.2
Education Level	No formal education	18	15.0
	Primary	29	24.2
	Secondary	36	30.0
	University/Diploma	37	30.8

The demographic data revealed that the majority of respondents (60.8%) were female, showing that mothers play a leading role in day-to-day child-rearing activities in Hargeisa households. Most parents (75.8%) were married, reflecting stable family units typical in Somali urban communities. Education levels varied, with about 60% having attained at least secondary or university-level education, suggesting an increasingly literate parent population in Hargeisa's urban centers.

### Common Parenting Styles among Somali Parents in Hargeisa

Parenting styles were measured across four categories authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglectful based on Baumrind's theoretical framework. The mean and standard deviation for each parenting style were computed to determine which approaches were most practiced by Somali parents. Respondents were assessed on four major parenting styles Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Neglectful based on Baumrind's typology. Composite mean scores were computed for each style, where higher mean values indicate stronger presence of that style.

Table 4.2. Parenting Styles

Parenting Style	Mean Score (1–5)	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Authoritarian	3.82	0.64	High
Authoritative	2.55	0.70	Moderate
Permissive	2.09	0.60	Low
Neglectful	3.55	0.68	High

Table 4.2 indicates that the authoritarian style was the most dominant parenting style among Somali parents in Hargeisa, followed by the neglectful style. The authoritative style ranked moderate, while permissive behavior was the least observed. This shows that most parents emphasize obedience, discipline, and control in child-rearing. These results align with previous literature (Patel & Goodman, 2007; Abdi, 2010) highlighting that Somali parent value respect, obedience, and family honor traits consistent with collectivist Muslim societies. However, the moderate mean for the authoritative style suggests that urban parents are gradually integrating dialogue and emotional support, showing a shift toward more balanced parenting practices influenced by education and exposure to modern child development ideas.

Over half (55%) of respondents exhibited a predominantly authoritarian approach, while 18.3% displayed neglectful tendencies. Only 16.7% demonstrated authoritative parenting. This dominance of authoritarianism reflects traditional Somali parenting norms that prioritize discipline, obedience, and family control. However, the presence of some authoritative parents indicates growing adaptation toward child-centered approaches, possibly influenced by education and urban exposure.

## Inferential Analysis of Parenting Styles

To examine differences across demographic variables, ANOVA tests were conducted.

**Education Level and Parenting Styles:** ANOVA revealed significant differences in authoritative parenting across education levels,  $F(3,116) = 4.21, p = .007$ . Parents with university/diploma education scored higher on authoritative parenting ( $M = 2.88$ ) compared to

those with no formal education ( $M = 2.10$ ). For authoritarian parenting, differences were marginally significant,  $F(3,116) = 2.65, p = .052$ , with less educated parents scoring higher. Neglectful parenting also varied significantly,  $F(3,116) = 3.12, p = .029$ , with lower education associated with higher neglect scores.

Interview data revealed clear differences in how parents with varying education levels approached discipline, communication, and emotional support. Parents with secondary or university education frequently described using reasoning, active listening, and empathy in their parenting. They highlighted learning about child development, psychology, and positive communication through school, work, or social exposure. In contrast, parents with little or no education relied more on traditional authoritarian methods, emphasizing obedience and respect as automatic expectations. These parents expressed concerns that leniency might lead to disobedience or moral decline. Overall, the qualitative evidence closely supports the quantitative trend: higher education correlates with more authoritative traits, while lower education aligns with stronger authoritarian and neglectful tendencies

**Gender and Parenting Styles:** Independent samples t-tests showed no significant gender differences in authoritarian parenting ( $t(118) = 1.12, p = .264$ ). However, mothers reported slightly higher authoritative tendencies ( $M = 2.61$ ) compared to fathers ( $M = 2.44$ ), though not statistically significant ( $t(118) = 1.48, p = .142$ ).

**Correlation Analysis:** Pearson correlations indicated a negative relationship between education level and authoritarian parenting ( $r = -.28, p < .01$ ), and a positive relationship between education level and authoritative parenting ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ). Age was positively correlated with neglectful parenting ( $r = .21, p < .05$ ), suggesting older parents may struggle with consistency due to socio-economic pressures.

The qualitative interviews strongly supported the quantitative findings showing that authoritarian parenting is the most practiced style among Somali parents in Hargeisa. Parents consistently described growing up in homes where rules were rigid, unquestioned, and enforced without negotiation. Many mothers stated that they inherited strict parenting from their own parents and felt obligated to maintain discipline to prevent disrespect and maintain family order. Fathers emphasized *sharaf* (honor) and the cultural expectation that children must obey immediately without argument. Some more educated parents expressed attempts to integrate explanation and emotional support, yet admitted that cultural expectations and how they themselves were raised often draw them back toward authoritarian responses. Overall, the interviews confirm that authoritarian practices are deeply rooted in Somali parenting traditions, while authoritative behaviors appear mainly among parents exposed to education and modern parenting ideas.

## Obedience as a Core Value in Somali Parenting

Parents repeatedly described obedience, respect, and discipline as the foundation of “proper Somali parenting.” The interview responses showed that parents believe strictness prevents children from “going astray,” especially in urban environments with many distractions. Mothers emphasized maintaining

household order, while fathers stressed their responsibility to ensure moral behavior and prevent misbehavior. Only a minority described democratic communication or shared decision-making. These views closely mirror the quantitative finding that authoritarian style dominated (55%), with neglectful tendencies appearing due to time pressure, economic strain, or exhaustion. The qualitative data thus reinforces the statistical results by illustrating why authoritarian parenting remains widespread in Hargeisa.

### **Cultural, Religious, and Urban Influences on Parenting Practices**

The second objective explored the extent to which cultural norms, Islamic teachings, and urban conditions affect parenting behavior. Respondents rated statements reflecting these influences, and the mean and standard deviation were calculated. Three contextual factors were measured: Islamic/Cultural Socialization, Socio-economic Constraints, and Balancing Modern and Traditional Life. Their mean scores are presented below.

Table 4.3: Contextual Factors of Parenting

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Islamic & Cultural Socialization	3.89	0.55	High
Socio-economic Constraints	3.50	0.60	Moderate–High
Balancing Modern and Traditional Life	3.33	0.65	Moderate

Islamic and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping parenting behavior. The high mean (3.89) confirmed that parents consistently emphasized religious instruction, respect for elders, and moral upbringing values deeply rooted in Somali culture and Islam. Socio-economic challenges (3.50) reflected that financial and time constraints influence parental consistency and discipline. Many urban parents struggle to balance livelihood pressures with active involvement in their children’s lives. The mean of 3.33 on balancing modern and traditional life indicated that urbanization exposes parents to new ideas about child development, but cultural expectations still limit full adoption of Western-style parenting models. This mixed pattern supports the notion of a hybrid parenting identity in Hargeisa simultaneously traditional and adaptive.

### **Islamic Tarbiyyah, Cultural Expectations, and Urban Pressures**

Qualitative findings strongly confirmed that Islamic and cultural values deeply shape parenting in Hargeisa. Parents described *tarbiyyah* (Islamic upbringing), teaching Qur’an, and promoting respect for elders as essential duties of a good parent. Mothers emphasized raising children to protect *sharaf* (family honor), while fathers emphasized modeling Islamic character through discipline and moral instruction. Parents also noted that urban life creates new pressures technology, social media, peer influence, diaspora exposure, and economic hardship making parenting more challenging than in past generations or rural contexts. Many felt torn between maintaining Somali traditions and adapting to modern expectations. Time limitations due to work and financial stress often reduced emotional availability, sometimes leading to unintentional neglect. Overall, the qualitative insights align closely with the quantitative results: cultural and Islamic influences are strong, while socio-economic pressures and urban change complicate parenting practices.

### **Summary and Integrated Interpretation**

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates that Somali parenting in Hargeisa

is shaped by a combination of religious values, cultural traditions, economic pressures, and modern urban challenges. Authoritarian parenting remains the dominant style, strongly reinforced by cultural norms and Islamic expectations regarding respect, discipline, and moral upbringing. However, parents with higher education levels are more likely to adopt authoritative approaches that incorporate reasoning and emotional support. Urbanization introduces complexities that challenge traditional parenting, sometimes resulting in inconsistent or neglectful practices due to stress or time constraints. Overall, the combined data shows that Somali parenting is undergoing gradual transformation while remaining firmly rooted in cultural and religious identity.

## Discussion

The results of the study show that, among Somali parents in Hargeisa, authoritarian parenting is still the most prevalent parenting style, closely followed by neglectful tendencies. Permissive and authoritative methods were less prevalent. This pattern demonstrates the enduring influence of Islamic values and cultural practices that value obedience, discipline, and family honor. The results are consistent with earlier studies carried out in collectivist Muslim societies, where authoritarian parenting has been accepted as a typical approach to childrearing (Patel & Goodman, 2007; Abdi, 2010). The study's parents' emphasis on *sharaf* (honor) and severe discipline as defenses against moral decline reflects the cultural expectation that children must comply without question.

Baumrind's (1971) typology, which links authoritarian parenting to high control and low responsiveness, is consistent with the prevalence of this parenting style. Nonetheless, the moderate prevalence of authoritative parenting among parents with higher levels of education points to a slow transition toward more conversational and encouraging methods. This result is consistent with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which holds that exposure to novel concepts and behavioral models can modify parenting styles. In other African urban contexts, education and urbanization have been shown to promote more balanced parenting styles (Mbugua, 2010; Osei-Tutu, 2014). Therefore, education seems to act as a moderating factor, encouraging parents to incorporate reasoning and emotional support, even though authoritarianism is still deeply ingrained.

The study also emphasizes how parenting practices are influenced by urban difficulties and socioeconomic pressures. Parents stated that time constraints and financial hardship frequently resulted in inconsistent or careless behaviors. This result is in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which highlights how family dynamics are influenced by environmental and socioeconomic contexts. Similar outcomes have been documented in urban African environments, where traditional parenting practices are complicated by financial hardship and exposure to contemporary distractions (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Hassan, 2015). The conflict between cultural continuity and contemporary influences is reflected in Hargeisa's hybrid parenting identity, which is both traditional and adaptive.

The transformative power of literacy and exposure is further reinforced by variations in parenting practices according to educational attainment. University or diploma-holding parents scored lower on authoritarian and neglectful tendencies and higher on authoritative dimensions. The qualitative evidence indicates that education improves parental flexibility, communication, and empathy, even though statistical tests did not show significant differences. These results align with research conducted in other Muslim-majority societies, where education has been associated with democratic family practices and increased tolerance (Dwairy et al., 2006; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2011). On the other hand, parents with less education tended to use more authoritarian techniques, reflecting worries that leniency could erode obedience and respect.

All things considered, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data shows that Somali parenting in Hargeisa is gradually changing. Education and exposure to cities are encouraging more authoritative approaches, but authoritarian practices are still prevalent and supported by cultural and religious norms.

In collectivist societies, where traditional values coexist with contemporary theories of child development, this duality reflects a larger pattern of adaptation. Significant policy and practice ramifications result from this: interventions meant to foster positive parenting should take into account the cultural importance of respect and obedience while also utilizing education and urban exposure to foster communication, empathy, and child-centered methods.

## Conclusion

Based on the integrated analysis, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. Authoritarian parenting remains the dominant style in Hargeisa. Somali parents continue to value strict discipline, obedience, and structured household rules, reflecting cultural traditions and Islamic interpretations emphasizing respect, responsibility, and moral behavior.
2. Parenting in Hargeisa is shaped by a powerful blend of Islamic values and Somali cultural norms. Parents see moral and religious upbringing as a sacred duty. The role of religion is deeply embedded in daily interactions, discipline, and guidance.
3. Urbanization and socio-economic pressures introduce considerable challenges. Parents increasingly navigate modern influences, such as technology, school demands, financial pressures, and shifting family structures. These pressures sometimes complicate parenting consistency and emotional availability, leading to unintentional neglect at times.
4. Parenting in Hargeisa is in a state of gradual transition. While traditional authoritarian practices remain strong, some parents especially highly educated ones are shifting toward more balanced, communicative, authoritative approaches.
5. Education plays a transformative role in parenting style. Parents with higher education demonstrate greater openness to non-authoritarian methods. Increased exposure to psychological knowledge, modern child development principles, and wider social networks encourages more positive parenting practices.
6. Mixed-methods findings confirm that Somali parenting is neither static nor homogenous. It reflects a hybrid model influenced by religion, culture, urban change, and individual parental experiences. Any interventions must therefore consider this complexity.

## Co-Author Contribution

Author 1 carried out the fieldwork, prepared the literature review and overlooked the whole article's write up. Authors 2, 3 wrote the research methodology and did the data entry.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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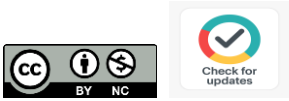
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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the manuscript and its [Supporting Information](#) files.