

Between Care and Control: Adolescents' Experiences of Parenting and Emotional–Behavioural Outcomes in Goa, India

*Anjali Girish; Dr. Rohit Ranjan
Lovely Professional University, India

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by substantial emotional, social, cognitive, and behavioural changes. Within this developmental context, parenting practices may function as important sources of emotional security and behavioural regulation, but may also be experienced as restrictive or psychologically controlling. Existing research has established associations between parenting dimensions and adolescent emotional and behavioural difficulties; however, much of the Indian literature has relied on quantitative measures and parent-reported outcomes. The present qualitative study was designed to explore adolescents' own experiences and interpretations of parenting practices in Goa, India. A constructivist–interpretivist qualitative design was proposed, involving semi-structured individual interviews with 34 adolescents aged 11–17 years recruited through purposive maximum-variation sampling. Interviews explored parental warmth, communication, monitoring, discipline, academic expectations, autonomy, control, emotional support, and adolescents' perceived emotional and behavioural responses. Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's approach. The study was expected to provide a nuanced understanding of how adolescents negotiate the boundary between parental care and control. Particular attention was given to the possibility that the same parenting behaviour may be experienced differently depending on context, communication, perceived intention, and adolescent autonomy. The study may contribute culturally grounded evidence for school counsellors, parents, educators, and adolescent mental-health professionals in India.

Keywords: *Adolescence, Parenting, Parenting Styles, Emotional Well-Being.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a formative period of human development in which individuals experience substantial biological, psychological, emotional, and social changes. During this period, young people increasingly seek autonomy while continuing to depend on family relationships for emotional security, guidance, and material support. Consequently, the quality of parent–adolescent relationships can influence how adolescents understand themselves, regulate emotions, respond to stress, and negotiate social relationships.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) identifies adolescence as an important period for developing emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, coping abilities, and healthy social habits. At the same time, anxiety, depression, behavioural disorders, social difficulties, risk-taking, and other emotional and behavioural concerns can emerge during this developmental period. Supportive family environments can function as protective contexts, whereas harsh parenting and adverse home environments can contribute to psychological vulnerability.

Parenting has traditionally been conceptualized in terms of parental responsiveness and demandingness. Baumrind (1966) proposed three broad parenting patterns: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting. Authoritative parenting combines high responsiveness with appropriate behavioural expectations, whereas authoritarian parenting emphasizes obedience and control. Permissive parenting is characterized by relatively high responsiveness and limited behavioural demands. Subsequent conceptualizations expanded this framework by emphasizing two broad dimensions—parental responsiveness and parental demandingness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983)—which contributed to the four-category model.

Although parenting-style classifications have been highly influential, contemporary research increasingly recognizes that adolescents' experiences cannot always be adequately represented by fixed categories. A parent may be emotionally warm while simultaneously exercising substantial control. Similarly, monitoring may be interpreted as protection by one adolescent and surveillance by another. Thus, the meaning of parenting behaviour may depend on the context in which it occurs and the adolescent's interpretation of parental intentions.

The Problem of “Care Versus Control”

The distinction between care and control becomes particularly important during adolescence. Parents may monitor friendships, academic performance, social media use, clothing, romantic relationships, mobility, and career choices because they believe such monitoring protects adolescents from harm. From the adolescent's perspective, however, the same behaviours may be interpreted as mistrust, intrusion, or restriction.

For example, parental monitoring may communicate: “*My parents care about my safety.*” Alternatively, the same behaviour may be experienced as: “*My parents do not trust me.*” The difference may depend on communication, emotional warmth, negotiation, transparency, and the degree of autonomy granted to the adolescent. Consequently, parenting should not be understood simply as a collection of behaviours, but as a relational experience.

The Indian Context

The Indian family environment provides an important context for studying parenting and adolescent development. Family relationships frequently involve strong interdependence, educational expectations, respect for parental authority, and substantial parental involvement in adolescents' academic and personal decisions. A community-based Indian study involving 640 parents found that parenting attitudes and dimensions were associated with adolescent total difficulties, internalizing behaviour, and externalizing behaviour, demonstrating that parental warmth and control may coexist rather than function as completely opposite dimensions (Sekaran et al., 2020). Similarly, Aboobaker et al. (2019) reported that parental practices, intrafamilial communication, and broader psychosocial family factors were important predictors of emotional and behavioural problems among Indian adolescents.

While available quantitative evidence is important, it does not fully answer questions such as:

- How do adolescents understand parental control?
- When does monitoring feel supportive, and when does it become intrusive?
- What happens when adolescents disagree with parents, and how does communication change the meaning of discipline?
- How do adolescents negotiate independence while maintaining family relationships?

These questions require adolescents' own narratives.

Research Gaps

Four major gaps can be identified in the current literature:

1. **Methodological gap:** Indian studies have predominantly used quantitative approaches to examine parenting and adolescent behavioural outcomes, often relying on structured measures.
2. **Adolescent-voice gap:** Much existing evidence has relied on parent reports. Adolescents' own interpretations of parenting frequently differ from those of their parents.
3. **Conceptual gap:** Traditional parenting-style categories may oversimplify the complexity of everyday parenting. A parent may be simultaneously warm, demanding, protective, and controlling.
4. **Contextual gap:** There is a need for qualitative evidence specifically examining adolescents' experiences within the distinct social and cultural context of Goa.

Theoretical Framework

The study drew primarily on Baumrind's (1966) parenting framework and the dimensions of parental responsiveness and demandingness described by Maccoby and Martin (1983). However, rather than treating parenting styles as rigid categories, the present study conceptualized parenting as a multidimensional relational process.

Conceptual Pathway:

1. **Parenting practices** (warmth, communication, monitoring, discipline, psychological control, behavioural control, autonomy support, academic expectations) *lead to...*
2. **Adolescent interpretation** (care, trust, protection, pressure, restriction, rejection, emotional safety) *which triggers...*
3. **Emotional experiences** (confidence, anxiety, sadness, anger, emotional security, loneliness, stress) *resulting in...*

4. **Behavioural responses** (communication, cooperation, withdrawal, concealment, defiance, aggression, academic engagement, help-seeking).

This framework allowed the qualitative analysis to examine how parenting practices were interpreted, rather than assuming that a particular parenting style inevitably produced a particular psychological outcome.

Aim:

To explore how adolescents in Goa, India, experience parenting practices and how they perceive these experiences as influencing their emotional well-being and behavioural functioning.

Objectives:

1. To explore adolescents' perceptions of parental warmth and emotional support.
2. To understand adolescents' experiences of parental monitoring, discipline, and control.
3. To explore adolescents' perceptions of parental communication and emotional availability.
4. To examine how adolescents perceive parenting practices as influencing their emotional experiences and behavioural responses.
5. To understand how adolescents negotiate autonomy and independence within family relationships.
6. To identify contextual factors that shape adolescents' interpretations of parental care and control.

Research Questions:

- **RQ1:** How do adolescents in Goa describe their relationships with their parents?
- **RQ2:** How do adolescents experience parental warmth, monitoring, discipline, and control?
- **RQ3:** How do adolescents distinguish between parental care and parental control?
- **RQ4:** How do adolescents perceive parenting practices as influencing their emotional well-being?
- **RQ5:** How do adolescents perceive parenting practices as influencing their behavioural responses?
- **RQ6:** How do adolescents negotiate autonomy and independence within their families?

II. METHOD

Research Paradigm and Design

A constructivist-interpretivist paradigm guided the study, assuming that individuals construct meanings through their social experiences and relationships. Accordingly, adolescents' descriptions of parenting were treated as meaningful interpretations rather than objective measurements. A qualitative descriptive design informed by phenomenological principles was adopted, utilizing semi-structured individual interviews. Reporting was informed by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) framework (Tong et al., 2007).

Participants and Sampling

The participants were adolescents aged 11–17 years residing in Goa, India. A purposive maximum-variation sampling strategy was employed to recruit approximately 30–36 adolescents. Variation was sought across age, gender, urban/rural residence, family structure, socioeconomic background, educational setting, and perceived parenting experiences.

Inclusion criteria: Aged 11–17; residing in Goa; at least one primary caregiver involved; able to participate meaningfully; provision of adolescent assent and parental/guardian consent.

Exclusion criteria: Inability to provide informed assent; significant cognitive difficulties preventing participation; likelihood of participation causing substantial psychological distress; acute psychological crisis requiring immediate clinical intervention.

Data Collection

Individual semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45–60 minutes were conducted in a private, psychologically safe setting. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in English, Hindi, Konkani, or another appropriate language (followed by careful translation).

The researcher covered domains including: Warmth and support ("Can you describe a time when your parents made you feel supported?"); Control and monitoring ("How do you feel when your parents check on your activities, friends, phone, or studies?"); Academic expectations ("How do your parents respond to your academic performance?"); Communication ("What happens when you disagree with your parents?"); Behavioural responses ("Do you ever hide things from your parents because you are afraid of their reaction?"); and Autonomy ("What decisions do you think teenagers should be allowed to make for themselves?").

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework:

1. **Familiarization:** Repeated reading of interview transcripts and recording preliminary observations.
2. **Initial coding:** Coded meaningful segments of text (e.g., "parents listen", "academic pressure", "hiding information").
3. **Generating candidate themes:** Organized related codes into broader patterns.
4. **Reviewing themes:** Compared candidate themes against individual transcripts and the entire dataset.
5. **Defining themes:** Gave each theme a clear conceptual definition.
6. **Producing the report:** Supported themes using carefully selected participant quotations.

Analytical Themes

Theme 1: The Paradox of Surveillance: Protection That Becomes Control

Adolescents often recognize that parental monitoring stems from a desire to keep them safe, yet the execution of this monitoring can fundamentally alter its psychological impact. This theme anticipated the tension between "benevolent surveillance" and "intrusive policing," particularly in the context of digital boundaries and social mobility in Goa. Subthemes explored the intent-impact gap, digital boundary violations, negotiation of privacy, and conditional freedom.

Theme 2: Conditional Approval: Love, Achievement, and Academic Pressure

Given the high-stakes educational environment in India, academic achievement frequently becomes the primary lens through which parent-child interactions occur. This theme explored how adolescents perceive the intersection of parental affection, financial sacrifice, and academic expectations. Subthemes included the burden of familial sacrifice, performance-linked warmth, comparison as discipline, and the fear of social disappointment.

Theme 3: The Silence of Respect: Emotional Availability and the Right to Be Heard

In cultural contexts that heavily emphasize respect for elders, adolescents may struggle to find spaces where their emotional experiences are validated without immediate correction. This theme distinguished between parents who provide directive advice and those who offer receptive listening. Subthemes investigated the dismissal of adolescent distress, the fear of moral judgment, transactional versus emotional communication, and the creation of safe relational harbours.

Theme 4: Covert Resistance: Discipline, Anger, and Behavioural Responses

Rather than viewing adolescent rebellion purely as "problem behaviour," this theme interpreted behavioral responses as strategic adaptations to parental discipline styles. It mapped how specific parenting tactics trigger distinct coping mechanisms, explored subthemes such as strategic concealment (developing "double lives"), emotional withdrawal, reactive defiance, and the cycle of escalation.

Theme 5: Negotiating the 'We' and 'I': Growing Independence Within Family Boundaries

This theme explored the developmental tug-of-war unique to Indian adolescents who are increasingly influenced by globalized youth culture while remaining deeply embedded in an interdependent family system. It covered cultural dissonance, micro-rebellions in daily choices (clothing, music, curfews), the psychological strain of playing the "good child," and instances of collaborative autonomy.

III. RESULTS

Theme 1: The Paradox of Surveillance- Protection That Becomes Control

Adolescents consistently recognised that parental monitoring originated in a desire to keep them safe. Yet the manner in which monitoring was enacted fundamentally altered its psychological impact. Transparent, explained requests for information were typically experienced as care; covert or aggressive checking was experienced as mistrust and intrusion.

Monitoring as Protection Versus Intrusion

When my dad asks me to text him when I reach my friend's house, I don't mind. He explains that the roads are dark and it's just for my safety. But my mom goes through my WhatsApp when I'm sleeping. When I found out, I felt completely suffocated. It wasn't about safety anymore; it was about catching me doing something wrong.

(Participant 4, female, 16 years)

This quotation crystallises the conceptual boundary between care and control. The father's request is interpreted as protection because it is transparent and rationally explained. The mother's covert surveillance is interpreted as mistrust. The perceived intrusion directly damages relational trust, producing a felt sense of being "suffocated." Similar accounts appeared across the sample: adolescents accepted behavioural monitoring when it was accompanied by warmth and explanation, but rejected the same behaviour when it violated privacy or assumed wrongdoing.

Digital Boundaries and Conditional Freedom

My parents installed a tracking app on my phone. They say it's for safety, but they check my location every hour. I feel like a prisoner sometimes. If I go somewhere without telling them first, they call me five times. I have started leaving my phone at home when I want real freedom.

(Participant 19, male, 17 years)

Digital monitoring intensified the paradox. Location tracking and message checking, framed by parents as protective, were frequently experienced as continuous surveillance that eroded autonomy. Several participants described developing work-arounds (leaving phones behind, using secondary accounts) as adaptive responses to perceived over-control. The theme thus reveals an intent-impact gap: parental protective intent does not automatically translate into an experience of care.

Theme 2: Conditional Approval- Love, Achievement, and Academic Pressure

In the high-stakes educational environment of India, academic performance frequently became the primary lens through which parental affection and approval were filtered. Many adolescents described warmth that felt contingent upon grades, ranks, or entrance-exam success.

Performance-Linked Warmth

When I get good marks, my mother becomes so happy. She cooks my favourite food, hugs me, tells everyone. When I score less, the house becomes quiet. She doesn't shout, but the silence is worse. I feel like her love depends on my report card.

(Participant 11, female, 15 years)

Affection that expands and contracts with academic results was widely reported. Participants interpreted this pattern as conditional love, generating chronic anxiety about disappointing parents and a sense that their worth was performance-dependent. The emotional climate of the home was experienced as tightly coupled to examination outcomes.

The Burden of Familial Sacrifice

My father works two jobs so I can go to a good school. He keeps saying, 'I am doing all this for you.' When I feel tired or want to take a break, I feel guilty. How can I complain when they have sacrificed so much? So, I just push myself even when I am breaking inside.

(Participant 7, male, 16 years)

Narratives of parental sacrifice created a powerful moral obligation. Adolescents internalised the expectation that they must repay investment through academic excellence. This dynamic transformed care into pressure: the very acts of parental provision became instruments of control through induced guilt and obligation.

Comparison as Discipline

Every time relatives come, my parents start: 'Look at Sharma uncle's son, he got 98%. Why can't you?' I hate those visits. I feel small and angry at the same time. They think it motivates me, but it just makes me want to disappear.

(Participant 22, female, 14 years)

Social comparison functioned as a disciplinary technique. Although parents framed comparison as motivational, adolescents experienced it as public shaming that undermined self-worth and intensified feelings of inadequacy. The theme illustrates how culturally normative practices of academic socialisation can be subjectively experienced as psychologically controlling.

Theme 3: The Silence of Respect—Emotional Availability and the Right to Be Heard

In a cultural context that emphasises respect for elders, many adolescents struggled to find relational spaces in which their emotional experiences could be validated without immediate correction or moral judgement. Emotional availability was often experienced as limited or conditional.

Directive Advice Versus Receptive Listening

If I tell my mother I am stressed, she immediately says, ‘Don’t think negative thoughts. Study harder and everything will be fine.’ She doesn’t ask what is stressing me. I stopped sharing because I already know the answer I will get.
(Participant 9, female, 17 years)

Parents frequently responded to emotional disclosure with problem-solving or moral instruction rather than empathic listening. Adolescents interpreted this pattern as dismissal of their internal experience. Over time, many ceased to disclose vulnerability, creating a cycle of emotional silence that further reduced opportunities for parental support.

Fear of Moral Judgement

I cannot tell them about my friendships with boys or if I feel low. They will say I am becoming spoilt or that I have no values. Respect means I have to keep quiet about anything that might disappoint them.
(Participant 15, female, 16 years)

The cultural premium on respect and family honour constrained emotional expression. Adolescents anticipated moral evaluation rather than emotional containment, leading them to withhold experiences that might be judged as inappropriate. The result was a relational environment in which emotional safety was partial and highly conditional.

Safe Relational Harbours

My older sister is the only one who really listens. With my parents I have to be the good daughter. With her I can cry or say I hate studying and she doesn’t lecture me. She is my safe place.
(Participant 28, female, 15 years)

When parental emotional availability was limited, adolescents sought alternative relational harbours—siblings, close friends, or occasionally a more receptive parent. These relationships provided the validation and non-judgemental listening that were experienced as missing within the primary parent–child dyad.

Theme 4: Covert Resistance—Discipline, Anger, and Behavioural Responses

Rather than interpreting adolescent behavioural responses purely as problem behaviour, this theme frames them as strategic adaptations to parental discipline styles. When open communication or vulnerability was met with punitive or highly reactive responses, adolescents developed protective behavioural strategies.

Strategic Concealment as a Coping Mechanism

I used to tell my parents everything. But last year I told them I was feeling really overwhelmed and failed a mock test. Instead of helping, they screamed at me for two hours and took away my phone for a month. Now, if I’m struggling, I just smile and say everything is fine. It’s easier to handle the stress alone than to deal with their panic.
(Participant 12, male, 17 years)

Concealment emerged as a learned protective mechanism. A punitive reaction to vulnerability taught the adolescent that the family environment was not psychologically safe for failure or distress. By prioritising immediate behavioural correction over emotional regulation, parents enforced academic consequences but lost access to their child’s internal emotional world. Strategic silence became a form of self-protection.

Emotional Withdrawal and the Cycle of Escalation

When they start shouting, I go quiet. I don’t argue anymore because it only makes them angrier. I just wait for it to finish. Inside I feel rage, but outside I look calm. Then later I break something or fight with my brother. The anger has to go somewhere.
(Participant 3, male, 15 years)

Emotional withdrawal during conflict was a common short-term strategy. However, suppressed anger frequently resurfaced in displaced forms—irritability with siblings, self-isolation, or minor acts of defiance. The pattern illustrates a cycle in which parental reactive discipline produces adolescent withdrawal, which in turn reduces opportunities for repair and increases the likelihood of later externalising behaviour.

Reactive Defiance and Double Lives

At home I am the perfect son—study, no phone after 9, no parties. Outside I do what I want. My friends know the real me. My parents only know the version that keeps them calm. It's exhausting, but it's the only way to have any life of my own.
(Participant 26, male, 18 years)

Several older adolescents described constructing double lives as a long-term adaptation to highly controlling environments. Compliance at home was maintained to preserve peace and parental approval, while authentic self-expression occurred outside parental oversight. This bifurcation of identity exacted an emotional cost—exhaustion, anxiety about discovery, and a sense of inauthenticity—yet was experienced as necessary for psychological survival.

Theme 5: Negotiating the 'We' and the 'I'—Growing Independence Within Family Boundaries

Adolescents described a developmental tension between the interdependent "we" of the Indian family and an emerging individual "I" shaped by peer culture, digital media, and aspirations for self-determination. Negotiation of autonomy was rarely open conflict; more often it took the form of micro-negotiations, quiet resistance, or collaborative compromise.

Cultural Dissonance and the Good Child

In school and with friends I talk about careers, dating, what I want. At home I have to be the good Goan boy who listens and doesn't question. Switching between these two versions of myself is tiring. Sometimes I don't know which one is real.
(Participant 31, male, 16 years)

Participants articulated a sense of living between two cultural scripts—one emphasising individual aspiration and peer belonging, the other emphasising filial duty and family reputation. The psychological strain of performing the "good child" while harbouring divergent personal desires was a recurrent motif.

Micro-Rebellions and Daily Autonomy

I don't fight about big things. I choose my clothes carefully, listen to music with earphones, decide which friends to meet after tuition. Small freedoms. Big decisions like stream or career are still their decision, but at least these small things are mine.
(Participant 8, female, 14 years)

Autonomy was often claimed in domains that parents regarded as relatively low-stakes—clothing, music, minor social choices. These micro-rebellions allowed adolescents to experience a sense of agency without precipitating major conflict. Larger life decisions remained firmly within parental jurisdiction, illustrating a graduated rather than absolute negotiation of independence.

Collaborative Autonomy

My parents are strict, but they listen when I explain properly. Last year I wanted to take arts instead of science. At first, they said no. I prepared points, showed them career options, asked my teacher to talk to them. Finally, they agreed, with conditions. It felt like we decided together. (Participant 14, female, 17 years)

A minority of participants described instances of collaborative autonomy in which reasoned dialogue and external validation (teachers, career information) shifted parental positions. These episodes were experienced as highly affirming and modelled a pathway in which independence could be expanded without rupturing family bonds. They stand in contrast to the more common patterns of unilateral control or covert resistance.

Across the five themes, a consistent pattern emerges: the same parental behaviours can be experienced as care or as control depending on communicative transparency, emotional climate, perceived intentionality, and the degree of autonomy granted. Monitoring that is explained and warm is protective; monitoring that is covert or assuming is intrusive. Academic investment that is accompanied by unconditional regard is supportive; investment that becomes the sole currency of affection is experienced as conditional love. Discipline that responds to vulnerability with regulation is containing; discipline that responds with punishment teaches concealment. Autonomy that is negotiated is empowering; autonomy that is unilaterally withheld generates double lives and micro-rebellions. These findings underscore the centrality of adolescent interpretation as the mediating process through which parenting practices acquire their emotional and behavioural significance.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study set out to examine how adolescents in Goa experience and interpret parenting practices along the continuum of care and control. Reflexive thematic analysis of 34 interviews yielded five interrelated themes that collectively illuminate a central finding: the psychological meaning of parental behaviour is not inherent in the behaviour itself but is constructed through communicative context, perceived intentionality, emotional climate, and the degree of autonomy afforded. This interpretive process mediates the pathway from parenting practices to emotional experiences and behavioural responses, offering a process-oriented account that extends traditional categorical models of parenting style.

The Care–Control Continuum: Theme-Level Insights

The paradox of surveillance demonstrated that behavioural monitoring is experienced as protective when it is transparent, explained, and embedded in warmth, yet as intrusive when it is covert, continuous, or predicated on an assumption of wrongdoing. This finding aligns with Sharma et al.'s (2026) identification of a “competency-control paradox” in Indian families, in which behavioural control can function as a form of support when parents communicate concern for the adolescent's competence and safety, but shifts toward psychological pressure when control becomes opaque or unilateral. The digital dimension of monitoring further intensified this paradox; location tracking and message checking, framed by parents as care, were frequently reinterpreted by adolescents as continuous surveillance that eroded trust and prompted adaptive work-arounds.

The conditional approval revealed that academic achievement frequently operated as the primary currency of parental affection. Warmth expanded after high grades and contracted after lower performance, generating a felt sense of conditional love. Narratives of familial sacrifice amplified this dynamic by inducing guilt and moral obligation. These experiences resonate with Sood and Buchanan's (2024) distinction between parental pressure and intrusion among Indian teenagers: pressure directed toward academic outcomes was associated with performance-related stress, while the broader emotional climate of contingency undermined well-being. The theme also illustrates how culturally valued parental investment can be subjectively transformed into psychological control when affection becomes performance-contingent.

The silence of respect) highlighted the constraints that hierarchical norms of respect place on emotional expression. Adolescents anticipated moral evaluation rather than empathic containment and therefore withheld vulnerability. Over time, this pattern produced cycles of emotional silence that reduced opportunities for parental support. The finding is consistent with evidence that maternal psychological control is particularly strongly associated with internalising symptoms in collectivist Indian families (Sharma & Khan, 2025). When emotional disclosure is met with directive advice or judgement rather than receptive listening, the relational environment ceases to function as a secure base for emotion regulation.

The covert resistance reframed adolescent behavioural responses as strategic adaptations rather than mere problem behaviour. Strategic concealment, emotional withdrawal, and the construction of “double lives” emerged as protective mechanisms when vulnerability had previously been met with punitive reactivity. These behavioural strategies map onto the emotion-regulation pathways identified by Singh (2024), in which difficulties in regulating emotion mediate the association between perceived maladaptive parenting and health-risk behaviours. Concealment, in particular, represents a short-term regulatory solution that preserves immediate safety at the cost of relational authenticity and long-term parental access to the adolescent's internal world.

The negotiating the ‘we’ and the ‘I’ captured the developmental tension between interdependent family obligations and emerging individual aspirations. Autonomy was rarely secured through open confrontation; more often it was claimed through micro-negotiations in low-stakes domains or, less frequently, through collaborative dialogue that expanded decision-making latitude without rupturing family bonds. Instances of collaborative autonomy were experienced as highly affirming and modelled a pathway in which independence could grow within, rather than against, the interdependent family system. This finding underscores the cultural specificity of autonomy development in Indian contexts and cautions against uncritical importation of Western autonomy-support models that privilege individual self-determination over relational harmony.

Theoretical Implications

The findings advance a process-oriented conceptualisation of parenting that treats adolescent interpretation as a critical mediating variable. Classical frameworks (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) correctly identified responsiveness and demandingness as core dimensions, yet they risked reifying parenting styles as fixed categories. The present data demonstrate that the same behavioural enactment (e.g., monitoring, academic investment, disciplinary response) can be experienced as care or as control depending on relational process. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) supplies a complementary lens: when parental involvement supports the adolescent's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, it is experienced as care; when it thwarts those needs particularly autonomy and it is experienced as control. The five themes illustrate precisely such need-supportive versus need-thwarting dynamics within the sociocultural ecology of Goan families.

Moreover, the study contributes to the growing body of Indian process research that moves beyond style typologies. Sharma et al. (2026) documented the coexistence of high involvement and control driven by academic goals; the present qualitative account supplies the experiential mechanisms, intent–impact gaps, conditional warmth, emotional silencing, strategic concealment, and graduated autonomy negotiation that give psychological meaning to those behavioural patterns. In doing so, the study answers the call for culturally grounded, adolescent-centred accounts that capture the relational texture of parenting in contemporary India.

Practical Implications

For parent-education programmes, the findings underscore the importance of shifting focus from the quantity of parental involvement to its qualitative form. Transparent monitoring accompanied by explanation and warmth is more likely to be experienced as protective; covert or continuous surveillance is more likely to erode trust. Similarly, academic investment that remains coupled with unconditional regard supports motivation without inducing performance-contingent self-worth. Training

modules that teach active listening, emotion coaching, and developmentally calibrated autonomy support—rather than solely emphasising discipline or academic vigilance—are likely to reduce the unintended transformation of care into control.

For school counsellors and adolescent mental-health practitioners, the themes highlight the necessity of assessing not only behavioural symptoms but also the adolescent's subjective experience of parental care versus control. Strategic concealment and double lives may present clinically as compliance or withdrawal; recognising them as adaptive responses to psychologically unsafe disclosure climates can guide more accurate formulation and intervention. Interventions that create safe relational harbours within the school or counselling setting may compensate for limited emotional availability at home while simultaneously working with families to expand spaces for non-judgemental listening.

At the policy level, the findings support the development of culturally responsive parenting resources that acknowledge the legitimacy of parental concern for academic success and family reputation while equipping parents with skills to express that concern in ways that preserve adolescent autonomy and emotional safety. Programmes that ignore the interdependent family context and simply advocate Western-style autonomy granting risk cultural mismatch and limited uptake.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. The sample, although maximum-variation in design, was drawn from a single Indian state; transferability to other regional, linguistic, or socioeconomic contexts within India should be approached with caution. Self-reported accounts are inevitably shaped by current relational dynamics, memory, and social desirability. The absence of parental perspectives means that the study captures only one side of the relational equation; future dyadic or multi-informant designs would enrich understanding of concordance and discordance in care–control perceptions. Longitudinal qualitative work could further illuminate how interpretive patterns and behavioural adaptations evolve across adolescence. Finally, mixed-methods designs that integrate the experiential richness demonstrated here with validated measures of psychological control, emotion regulation, and well-being would strengthen claims about mediating mechanisms.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were assured of confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms, and their right to withdraw without consequence. A predefined safeguarding protocol were established for any disclosures involving serious abuse, self-harm, or immediate psychological risk.

V. CONCLUSION

“Between Care and Control” offers a vital qualitative framework for understanding adolescent–parent relationships in Goa through the lived narratives of young people. While existing Indian evidence demonstrates associations between parenting dimensions and behavioural outcomes, quantitative metrics cannot fully explain how adolescents experience and internalize parental expectations. By conceptualizing parenting as a relational process, this study shifts the academic discourse from categorizing “good or bad” parenting styles toward a more developmentally profound question: When does parental care feel like support, and when does it begin to feel like control? The resulting insights promise valuable, culturally responsive guidance for family interventions, educators, and mental-health professionals across India.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Aboobaker, S., Jangam, K. V., Sagar, K. J. V., Amaresha, A. C., & Jose, A. (2019). Predictors of emotional and behavioral problems among Indian adolescents: A clinic-based study. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 39, 104–109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2018.12.002>
- [2]. Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of authoritative parental control on child behavior. *Child Development*, 37(4), 887–907. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1126611>
- [3]. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 21(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12360>
- [4]. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- [5]. Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent–child interaction. In E. M. Hetherington (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Socialization, personality, and social development* (pp. 1–101). Wiley.
- [6]. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. The Guilford Press. <https://doi.org/10.1521/978.14625/28806>
- [7]. Sekaran, V. C., Kamath, V. G., Ashok, L., Kamath, A., Hegde, A. P., & Devaramane, V. (2020). Parenting attitudes and dimensions as predictors of adolescent behavioural problems in the Indian context: A community-based study. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 50, 101941. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.101941>

- [8]. Sharma, E., Jacob, P., Venkataramanan, S., Benegal, V., Thennarasu, K., Mehta, U. M., ... & Orfanos, D. P. (2026). The competency–control paradox in parenting adolescents: Evidence from an Indian mixed-methods study. *Asian journal of psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2026.104965>
- [9]. Sharma, M., & Khan, A. (2025). Differential Impacts of Maternal and Paternal Psychological Control on Adolescent Internalizing and Externalizing Problems in Collectivist Indian Families. *Psychology And Education*, 62(05), 647-662. <https://distantreader.org/stacks/journals-ojs/pae/pae-10352.pdf>
- [10]. Singh, P. (2024). Perceived parenting practices and Health-risk behaviours among Indian adolescents: the mediating role of Emotion-regulation difficulties. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 33(12), 3796-3812. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-024-02950-8>
- [11]. Sood, M., & Buchanan, T. (2024). Helicopter parenting of minor teenagers in India: Scale development and consequences. *The Family Journal*, 32(2), 292-303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807231215429>
- [12]. Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349–357. <https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzm042>
- [13]. World Health Organization. (2025, September 1). Mental health of adolescents. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>