

Parenting style and emotional resilience: the role of democratic parenting in single-parent families

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Keywords

Democratic Parenting; Emotional Resilience; Middle Childhood; Single Parents.

Abstract

Parental style shapes a child's character and emotional resilience, particularly within single-parent families. This study explores how single parents implement democratic parenting and how it influences the emotional resilience of children aged 7 and 8. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving three single parents and two teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Tonggalan. Thematic analysis revealed that democratic parenting—characterized by open communication, rule negotiation, and consistent emotional support—could still be applied effectively by single parents despite their dual-role burdens. Children raised under this approach exhibited high levels of emotional resilience, including emotional regulation, conflict resolution, frustration tolerance, and confidence in social interaction. External factors such as teacher and peer support also significantly enhanced emotional resilience. These findings highlight the strategic role of schools and community programs in supporting single parents in adopting effective parenting strategies for optimal child development.

INTRODUCTION

Middle childhood (ages 7–8) is critical for developing emotional intelligence and resilience. At this stage, children begin to handle complex emotions, regulate emotional responses, and navigate social relationships independently (Mammarella et al., 2018). Emotional resilience—adapting, recovering from stress, and managing adversity—is crucial in this phase, especially in school environments where academic and social pressures coexist (Dai et al., 2025).

Emotional resilience refers to a child's ability to recover from emotional distress and adapt to changes or life difficulties (Sia & Aneesh, 2024). Children with high emotional resilience tend to exhibit better self-control, greater capacity to resolve interpersonal conflicts, and maintain healthy social relationships (Godleski & Ostrov, 2020; Waterson, 2018).

One of the key factors influencing emotional resilience is parenting style. Democratic parenting, characterized by a balance of control and warmth, has been proven effective in supporting children's emotional development and prosocial behavior (Al-Aisyi & Listiana, 2024; Anshari et al., 2024). This

parenting style creates a psychologically safe environment for child development through open communication and involving children in decision-making.

However, not all families are in an ideal position to implement democratic parenting optimally. In single-parent families, the dual role of breadwinner and caregiver often results in a high emotional burden and significant time constraints (Ali et al., 2024). These challenges may lead to inconsistent parenting practices and risk undermining the quality of parent-child interactions (Trumello et al., 2023).

At SD Muhammadiyah Tonggalan Klaten, field data reveal that several students from single-parent households struggle with emotional expression, are easily frustrated, and demonstrate limited ability to resolve social conflicts healthily. This phenomenon reinforces findings from previous studies emphasizing the importance of home and school environments in strengthening children's emotional regulation (Hurst et al., 2020; MacKerron & Powdthavee, 2022). Unfortunately, there remains a research gap specifically examining the direct relationship between democratic parenting by single parents and emotional resilience in middle childhood. Most existing literature has focused either on early childhood (Arlianty et al., 2025) or adolescence (Chavda & Nisarga, 2023), leaving a crucial scientific void to be addressed.

This study also offers novelty in terms of its contextual setting—an Islamic-based primary school—where spiritual and social values significantly shape children's development. Such a context is rarely explored in developmental psychology research, especially within the framework of non-nuclear families. Therefore, it is essential to examine how single parents practice democratic parenting under challenging circumstances, and how this parenting style impacts children's ability to manage emotions and withstand psychosocial stress. The study is expected to bridge theoretical gaps while offering practical guidance for schools and families.

Democratic parenting is considered one of the most effective strategies in nurturing emotional regulation, empathy, and children's interpersonal skills (Al-Aisyi & Listiana, 2024; Anshari et al., 2024). Waters and Sun (2016) found that strength-based parenting interventions can enhance children's positive emotions and self-efficacy, especially in families with open communication. In single-parent households, the biggest challenge lies in maintaining the quality of emotional interactions amid economic and psychological burdens (Ali et al., 2024; Trumello et al., 2023). Sia and Aneesh (2024) also found that a child's emotional resilience in single-parent families heavily depends on the parent's ability to regulate emotions and display social competence in daily parenting.

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) by Dai et al. (2025), which focused on school-home collaboration, demonstrated that targeted intervention programs for single parents can significantly improve children's resilience to social stress. This is supported by findings which highlight the central role of mother-child interaction dynamics in shaping behavioral regulation from the preschool years. Thus, democratic parenting, when applied consistently—even amid constraints—can serve as a vital source of psychological strength for children. The role of schools as secondary support should not be overlooked, as teacher and peer interactions have also been shown to serve as additional protective factors in children's socio-emotional development (Arlianty et al., 2025; Hurst et al., 2020).

The Rationale of the Study

The increasing prevalence of single-parent households presents unique challenges to child development, particularly in the area of emotional resilience during middle childhood. While previous studies have highlighted the role of parenting styles in shaping children's socio-emotional competencies, few have focused specifically on how democratic parenting functions within single-parent contexts, especially in religious school settings. Middle childhood is a pivotal phase where children begin to develop emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and interpersonal confidence, making this period especially sensitive to parenting influences. Given the dual burden faced by single parents as both caregivers and providers, it is critical to explore whether and how democratic parenting can still be effectively

implemented. This study addresses a notable research gap by examining the lived experiences of single parents applying democratic parenting at an Islamic-based elementary school. It aims to reveal the extent to which such parenting can bolster children's emotional resilience despite structural and emotional limitations in the family environment. The findings are expected to contribute to the academic discourse on child development in non-nuclear families and inform practical interventions for schools and communities.

Study Aim and Hypothesis

This study examines the influence of democratic parenting practiced by single parents on the emotional resilience of children aged 7 and 8 at SD Muhammadiyah Tonggalan Klaten. This research seeks to identify how a parenting style that balances control and warmth can strengthen children's ability to manage emotions, build healthy social relationships, and cope with psychosocial pressures in a value-based Islamic primary school environment. The central hypothesis of this study is that single parents apply more consistently democratic parenting, which results in a higher level of emotional resilience in children as they face developmental challenges during middle childhood.

METHODS

Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach. This approach was chosen to explore how single parents practice democratic parenting and how it influences the emotional resilience of children aged 7–8 years in the context of an Islamic-based elementary school. The qualitative method enabled the researchers to capture subjective experiences and parenting practices within their natural settings.

Participants

The participants consisted of three single parents whose children, aged 7–8 years, were enrolled at SD Muhammadiyah Tonggalan, Klaten. In addition, two homeroom teachers were involved as supporting informants to provide triangulated information regarding the children's emotional conditions in the school environment. Participants were selected purposively based on predetermined criteria: single-parent status, having children within the specified age range, and willingness to participate in in-depth interviews.

Instruments

The main instrument in this study was a semi-structured interview guide developed based on theories of emotional resilience and parenting styles. The guide included open-ended questions to explore daily parenting practices, parent–child communication patterns, emotional coping strategies, and children's experiences in social or academic pressure. In addition to interviews, observation sheets were used to record children's emotional behavior in the classroom, and documentation (e.g., teacher notes, academic reports) served as supplementary data.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which includes three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction phase, relevant information was selected and categorized into key themes related to democratic parenting and emotional resilience. The data were then organized into narrative and thematic matrices to identify emerging patterns and relationships. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on consistent and corroborated findings. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation and member checking were applied. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from parents, teachers, and field

observations. Member checking involved validating the researchers' interpretations with the participants to ensure the meaning accurately reflected their lived experiences

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Implementation of Democratic Parenting

Findings revealed that the single parents participating in this study consistently applied democratic parenting styles, despite the challenges of managing dual responsibilities and limited time. They actively engaged in two-way communication with their children to foster independence, openness, and a sense of responsibility. Children were involved in household rule-making and were encouraged to express their opinions freely.

One participant stated,

"I always tell my child that the rules are not meant to make things harder, but for the good of us both. For example, about playtime, I ask him to decide together when it's time to study and when to rest." (P1)

Another parent emphasized the importance of open communication,

"My child tells me everything now when he has problems. Even when I'm tired, I try to listen because I know he needs someone to talk to." (P3)

In addition to communication, valuing children's emotions was a key element. Parents did not dismiss or punish their children's emotional expressions but guided them in recognizing and managing feelings constructively. For instance, when the child was angry or upset, the parent would help them calm down before having a reflective conversation.

Despite dealing with fatigue, job stress, and emotional burdens, the single parents showed a strong commitment to maintaining warmth and consistency in parenting. Spiritual motivation and the desire to provide the best for their children were driving factors behind their dedication to democratic parenting practices.

Children's Emotional Resilience

Children raised under democratic parenting showed promising levels of emotional resilience. They were able to manage their emotions in response to conflicts both at home and in school. One child, for instance, was observed to avoid impulsive behavior and chose to calm themselves before expressing anger—an indication of well-developed self-regulation.

A teacher shared the following observation:

"When the child is scolded for making a mistake, he doesn't sulk. Instead, he says, 'Yes Ma'am, I'll try to fix it tomorrow.' That's remarkable for a child his age." (T1)

From the parents' side, emotional support was embedded in daily routines at home.

"I make it a habit to ask him about his day at school. If something upset him, I asked him to explain it and then ask, 'If you were your friend, how would you want to be treated?' That way, he learns empathy too." (P2)

Confidence was also evident. The children actively participated in group activities, asked questions in class, and shared their opinions—signs of emotional stability and self-assurance. These behaviors were supported by self-awareness and emotion regulation practices developed through democratic parenting.

Moreover, the children demonstrated the ability to resolve peer conflicts independently. They did not rely entirely on adults to mediate disputes, but instead attempted dialogue with their peers first. This behavior showed emotional self-control, an emerging sense of empathy, and social problem-solving.

School Environment Support

The environment at SD Muhammadiyah Tonggalan played a strategic role in supporting the emotional resilience of students from single-parent families. The school's religious, empathetic, and communicative atmosphere provided a safe and nurturing space for children to grow emotionally and socially.

One teacher explained:

"Here, we never treat children differently because of their family background. We support children from single-parent families more closely because we know they often need extra emotional attention." (T2)

From the parents' perspective, the school was seen as a partner in maintaining the child's emotional well-being.

"I'm very grateful that my child's school is so communicative. If my child is feeling sensitive or has a problem, the teacher immediately lets me know so we can work on it together." (P1)

Peer interactions also played a crucial role in strengthening resilience. There was no indication of exclusion or bullying toward children from single-parent homes. On the contrary, they were accepted and actively involved in classroom and extracurricular activities. These findings reinforce that parenting at home and a supportive school ecosystem shape children's emotional resilience. Effective collaboration between teachers and parents greatly enhances children's sense of stability and emotional security, especially in managing academic and social pressures in primary school settings.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the democratic parenting style adopted by single parents significantly contributes to the emotional resilience of children aged 7–8 years. This style is characterized by two-way communication, allowing children to participate in decision-making, and respecting the child's emotional experiences. These findings are consistent with the study which asserted that children raised under authoritative (democratic) parenting exhibit superior emotional regulation and resilience in facing social and academic pressures (Fitrianto et al., 2025).

As observed in this study, children's involvement in household decision-making reinforces the findings of (Gunawan & Bantali, 2025), which revealed that child participation enhances responsibility, autonomy, and emotional bonding with parents. In single-parent contexts, such participation yields positive psychological effects by reducing relational tension and strengthening the child's self-confidence. Thus, openness in parenting becomes a vehicle for character building and emotional strength.

Parental strategies in guiding children to recognize and express emotions align with the concept of meta-emotion parenting. Puspitasari and Wati (2018) show that parents who act as emotional coaches significantly improve children's empathy and emotional regulation. This study observed similar practices, where parents taught children to consider issues from others' perspectives, reinforcing parenting models that support emotional development in non-intact families.

Sia and Aneesh (2024) further support these findings, showing that in single-parent families, children's emotional regulation and social competence are strongly influenced by parental emotional involvement. Children receiving consistent emotional support from a single parent demonstrated adaptive capabilities equivalent to those from two-parent households. This highlights that the quality of parenting outweighs family structure.

A supportive and religious school environment was also found to bolster children's emotional resilience. This supports (Shodiq et al., 2025), who reported that value-based religious education is a protective factor for the emotional well-being of children from vulnerable families. In the context of SD Muhammadiyah, a warm and inclusive school setting complements democratic parenting at home, creating a stable and emotionally nurturing caregiving ecosystem.

Research by [Ubabuddin et al. \(2020\)](#) in the Karaban Jaya community also confirms that single parents who integrate Islamic values into their parenting tend to have stronger emotional resilience and are more capable of instilling virtues in their children ([Khoirunnisa & Nasikhin, 2024](#)). These findings are echoed in [Saiin et al. \(2024\)](#), who emphasized how Muslim single parents shape children's character through emotional and spiritual closeness.

The study by ([Andrina & Karlaili, 2022](#)) also supports the present findings, arguing that the synergy between democratic parenting, single-parent resilience, and a supportive school climate plays a vital role in shaping children's emotional and moral development. A religious and empathetic school environment extends home-based parenting, especially when teachers exhibit warmth and emotional closeness toward students.

Attachment theory is also highly relevant to these findings. [Rohmah and Sulong \(2023\)](#) emphasized that strong emotional bonds between children and adults—whether parents or teachers—serve as the foundation for emotional resilience and self-regulation. This is reflected in the current study, where children felt secure expressing emotions at home and school.

Meanwhile, the Family Stress Model posits that economic stress and dual-role pressures in single-parent families can diminish parental sensitivity ([Saasa et al., 2021](#)). However, this study found that parents with strong spiritual reflection and intrinsic motivation could manage such stress effectively, maintaining consistent emotional support. This highlights the importance of parental psychological resilience in preserving quality parenting.

Finally, the findings extend those of previous quantitative studies that established significant relationships between authoritative parenting and students' academic resilience ([Chutia & Swargiary, 2024](#)). While the latter focused on academic domains, the present study reveals that resilience in children applies cognitively and emotionally. Therefore, appropriate parenting approaches in primary school years have long-term implications for children's psychosocial equilibrium.

Implications

The findings of this study carry significant practical and theoretical implications, particularly within the context of single-parent households and value-based elementary education. The results demonstrate that single parents can effectively implement democratic parenting to foster children's emotional resilience. Therefore, parenting programs emphasizing two-way communication and emotional coaching should be integrated into school and community-based interventions. Value-oriented schools such as SD Muhammadiyah Tonggalan can strengthen this role by cultivating a supportive and empathetic learning environment while promoting close collaboration with parents. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing literature on the effectiveness of democratic parenting in non-nuclear family structures. It underscores the importance of home-school partnership in shaping emotional resilience during middle childhood.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the small sample size—comprising three single parents and two teachers—limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative, descriptive design does not allow for causal inferences or statistical generalization. Third, the unique religious school setting may restrict the applicability of results to other educational contexts. Future research should consider employing quantitative or mixed-method approaches with larger and more diverse samples and longitudinal designs to examine the long-term impact of democratic parenting on emotional resilience. Additionally, further studies may explore the role of child gender and surrogate parental figures in shaping emotional resilience in single-parent families.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that democratic parenting practiced by single parents significantly contributes to developing emotional resilience among children aged 7–8. Despite the emotional strain and dual-role burdens, single parents who consistently maintain open communication, provide emotional support, and involve their children in decision-making create a nurturing environment that supports emotional regulation and self-confidence. These findings affirm that the quality of parenting is more influential than family structure. Moreover, a supportive, religious, and inclusive school environment further enhances the positive effects of democratic parenting. Therefore, strong collaboration between parents and schools is essential in fostering emotional resilience, particularly for children in single-parent households.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Universitas Muhammadiyah Klaten, Indonesia, for funding this research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

All authors agree to the final version of this article.

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