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Umme Jasmine

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The International Journal of Health, Wellness, and Society
ISSN: 2156-8960 (Print), ISSN: 2156-9053 (Online)
Volume 15, Issue 3
https://doi.org/10.18848/2156-8960/CGP/v15i03/97-123

Original Research

Construction of Protective Parenting Practices in a Transitional Social Context by Two Generations of Bangladeshi Mothers

Umme Habiba Jasmine, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Received: 10/16/2024; ***Accepted:*** 02/13/2025; ***Published:*** 03/21/2025

Abstract: The construct of protective parenting in Bangladesh is understudied. To address this gap, this study explored how two generations of Bangladeshi mothers constructed protective parenting practices. This study followed a cross-sectional hermeneutic phenomenological research design. Using purposive sampling, eleven maternal grandmothers (first generation, G1) and eleven mothers (second generation, G2) were selected. Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using the hermeneutic circle. Eight protective parenting practices were uncovered: monitoring and choosing friends for children, gender boundaries, chaperonage, arranging marriage, religious upbringing, engineering fear, observing traditional rituals, and saving money. While protective parenting values were sustained across both generations, differences were revealed between the G1 and G2's identification of security risks and modes of ensuring safety. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of considering cultural and social contexts in understanding parenting. The scholarly contributions of this article are the identification, contextualization, and definition of protective parenting practices. Additionally, this study contributes to research methodology discourses by presenting a parenting dimensions framework to study parenting practices in under-researched communities. In future studies, fathers, grandfathers, and paternal grandmothers should be included to glean a more complete picture of the protective practices of Bangladeshi parents. This study highlights the need to develop effective social safety policies with the efforts of administration, community organizations, and residents' representatives. This study also offers insights into rendering parenting interventions more culturally appropriate.

Keywords: *Protective Parenting, Transitional Social Context, Bangladesh, Culture and Tradition, Intergenerational*

Introduction

Protective parenting practices play a vital role in children's survival, nurturing the overall well-being and development of children. Despite its importance, the protective parenting construct is largely overlooked in parenting research (Bakermans-Kranenburg and van IJzendoorn 2017). Further, the influence of social context in the construction of protective parenting is understudied. This study investigates the construction of protective parenting practices by two generations of Bangladeshi mothers in their daily lives. This study also explores the role that social and cultural contexts play in this process.

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Protective parenting encompasses a wide range of behaviors and strategies that are employed by parents or other caregivers to ensure the safety, security, and healthy development of children. Bakermans-Kranenburg and van IJzendoorn (2017) characterized protective parenting as an evolutionary behavior across species that complements "the innate bias of each newborn to strive for proximity to a potentially protective attachment figure" (47). On the other hand, Kiel and Buss (2011) conceptualized protective parenting as the presence of warmth, comfort, and restriction on children's unwanted behaviors. Thus, researchers identified evolutionary, affective, and disciplinary characteristics.

Protection-Focused Parenting

The literature on protective parenting focuses on parental monitoring, positive discipline, and parental involvement. Parental monitoring is an essential element of protective parenting practices. Rodríguez-Meirinhos et al. (2020) and Velazquez et al. (2023) reported that consistent monitoring was associated with a lower incidence of externalizing behaviors, substance abuse, and engagement in risky activities among adolescents. Ryan-Pettes et al. (2022), on the other hand, recommended that parental monitoring only in the presence of consistent discipline is effective against marijuana use and associating with deviant peers in crime-concentrated neighborhoods. However, parental monitoring in early adolescence rather than late adolescence was suggested to be effective against associating with deviant peers and marijuana use (Booth and Shaw 2023). In the context of internet and technology development, parental monitoring is extended to track children's, especially adolescents,' use of social media, exposure to questionable content, national and cross-national cyberbullying, and cyberbully victimization (Baldry et al. 2019; Wang et al. 2005; Zhu et al. 2021). Sometimes, parents make an effort to reduce children's technology and internet use and resort to parental control software to reduce young children's exposure to inappropriate content (Gallego et al. 2020). The context naturally demands the development of children's media use-specific family rules and parenting practices. Positive discipline reportedly protects children from physical, habitual, and psychological harm by promoting a nurturing and supportive environment that fosters healthy development. Studies by Adalbjarnardottir and Hafsteinsson (2001) and Bej (2016) found that children who experienced positive discipline were less likely to engage in socially risky behaviors and substance abuse, while Nelsen et al. (2016) discovered that this approach was also protective against depression. Furthermore, research by Bej (2016) and Durrant (2016) revealed that children who received positive discipline reported higher life satisfaction and self-esteem, dignity, and non-violent communication skills. Overall evidence suggests that positive discipline not only prevents physical and psychological harm but also promotes healthier habitual behaviors and enhances overall well-being. Likewise, parental involvement variables such as parents' high aspirations for children's success, parent–child communication, and parental encouragement

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and support promote academic achievement (Boonk et al. 2018; Jaiswal and Choudhuri 2017). These factors also shape children's values, competence, and positive character traits (Brannon 2008). By so doing, parents promote high achievement and enhance their children's self-esteem.

Parents' use of protective and safety measures is commonly discussed in the context of high-risk neighborhoods (Jarrett 1999; Tillyer et al. 2018); child road-traffic accidents (Dellinger and Kresnow 2010); indoor and outdoor unintentional injuries, death (Kendrick et al. 2013); substance abuse, behavioral problems (Becerra and Castillo 2011; Pugh and Richter 2023; Simons-Morton 2004); and combating supernatural powers (Hamadani and Tofail 2014). Nevertheless, the literature on protective and safety measures in everyday parenting in Bangladesh is limited. This study aims to bridge this gap, and addresses the following questions: (a) What protective parenting practices do Bangladeshi mothers follow? (b) What roles do social and cultural contexts play in shaping protective parenting practices?

Culture in Contextualizing Parenting Behavior

Culturally specific variations in parenting motivate researchers to find culture-specific meanings. Baumrind (1966) and Maccoby and Martin (1983) suggest four parenting styles based on the North American, White, and middle-class populations. Domenech Rodríguez et al. (2009) found eight contextual parenting styles among Latino populations, one of which is protective parenting. The difference in findings suggests that parenting practices and styles are built upon socio-cultural needs, demands, and traditions.

Diverse belief systems around the world lead to diversity in the practices and meanings of child protection. For example, Zimbabwean mothers smear breast milk on babies' genitals to protect them from sex addiction in adulthood and to prevent them from having multiple partners (Kudzai 2013). Bangladeshi parents use kohl on a child's forehead or soles, and tie amulets in the home or on the baby, believing that these protect the child from "evil eyes" (cultural belief that people curse out of jealousy and send bad luck with a glare of eyes) (Hamadani and Tofail 2014). Some traditional beliefs related to child protection can be deadly. A study in Matlab, Bangladesh, identified the belief that if parents try to rescue their child who is drowning themselves, then the child would die (Blum et al. 2009). Consequently, parents would rather find a third party to rescue the child. Nordestino mothers in Brazil believe that children born weak and sick will be further damaged if they live. As a result, they let those sick children die by selective neglect (Scheper-Hughes 1993). These mothers believe they are saving their children from growing up as "deficient" or "burdens." These examples indicate that cultural beliefs and social contexts shape child protection strategies and suggest the importance of considering protective parenting within cultural contexts.

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Theoretical Framework

Parenting practices are structural components of parenting dimensions. In the absence of a theory of parenting practice, I preferred to use parenting dimensions to study parenting practices in a less-researched Southeast Asian community. This was because of its capacity to accommodate culture-specific meanings (Stewart and Bond 2002). Parenting styles, on the other hand, are a cluster of parenting dimensions. Parenting styles may not untangle culture-specific elements of parenting. Based on this assertion, I analyzed existing parenting-related theories. These included Ainsworth (1979) and Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment, Baumrind's (1967, 1989) theory of parenting typology, Gesell's (1952) theory of maturation, and Watson's (1928) behaviorism, emphasizing psychological care of infants and children. Five parenting dimensions were identified from the analysis: warmth, discipline, demandingness, proximity, and communication.

The warmth dimension is derived from the affective interaction concept of the theory of attachment (Bowlby 1969), sensitivity to children's needs and signals concept of Ainsworth (1967), and the affectionate expression concept of Baumrind's (1967) theory of parenting typologies. The discipline dimension lays its root in the concept of management of reinforcement and punishment for behavior modification of Watson's (1928) Behaviorism, and the concept of parental control of Baumrind's (1967) theory of parenting typologies. The demandingness dimension is derived from the permissive concept of Gesell's (1952) theory of maturation, and maturation demand concept of Baumrind's theory. The proximity dimension remains common in both the theory of attachment and the theory of parenting typologies' concept of warmth with a physical ground. Close proximity functions as a means of affiliation and non-verbal communication. In this regard, communication is also a common element of warmth and proximity. Moreover, the communication dimension also appears in the concept of discipline with both verbal and non-verbal media. Consequently, the communication dimension is deeply grounded in the theory of attachment, the theory of parenting typologies, and behaviorism theory.

Methods

The article explores two generations of Bangladeshi mothers' constructions of protective parenting practices from their lived experiences. Cross-sectional hermeneutic phenomenology design was followed from a social constructivist philosophical position. This article is based on a study conducted in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which investigated the general parenting practices of two generations of Bangladeshi mothers.

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Study Site and Participant Selection

The study was conducted in Mirpur, Dhaka. Being the capital city and the center of administration, education, and opportunities in Bangladesh, Dhaka accommodates diverse residents from across the country. People from diverse subcultures of the broader Bengali culture live there. It is a city of migrants with predominantly nuclear family structures, which enables parents to be children's primary caregivers. This diverse population provided rich data.

A Short Description of the Context of the Study Site

Large-scale urbanization in Dhaka began in the 1990s, driven by inner migration and housing facilities for the middle-class population. Mirpur is predominantly a habitat of middle-class residents. The second wave of urbanization followed in the 2000s with notable developments in residential and commercial sectors. This second wave reformatted the cultural identity of migrants while eroding the traditional communal nature of the city (Rashid 2021). Subsequently, social bonding, values, and the sense of communal responsibilities were ominously impacted. Over time, Dhaka increasingly faced rising insecurity and crime. Reports from 2006 highlighted a rise in substance abuse, abduction, and gender-based violence (Hossain 2006), concerns that remain relevant to this day (Atkinson-Sheppard 2019).

Sample Selection and Participant Characteristics

Through purposive and snowball sampling eleven maternal grandmother (first generation, G1) and mother (second generation, G2) dyads were selected. The primary criteria of sample selection were that the mother (G2) participant would have at least one school-going child of grade 1 to 12 with an accessible grandmother (G1) participant, and that the participants would not have a developmentally challenged child. Incidentally, all participants were Muslims, likely due to the high density of the Muslim population (91.08%) in the country (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2023). The participants' socio-demographic information is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Dyad #	*Type of Participants*	*Pseudonym*	*Age*	*Number of Children and Age Range*	*Level of Education*	*Occupation*	*Monthly Family Income (BDT)*	*Income Source*
1	Mother	Panna	42	1 (9 years)	Master's	Housewife	50,000	Husband's business
	Grandmother	Tara	56	4 (19–34 years)	Below SSC*	Housewife	100,000	House rent and husband's business
2	Mother	Dali	50	2 (18–29 years)	HSC**	Housewife	48,000	Rent and husband's job
	Grandmother	Hena	69	4 (33–52 years)	Grade 5	Housewife	35,000	Rent
3	Mother	Shirin	49	2 (9–18 years)	Master's	Housewife	40,000	Husband's job
	Grandmother	Fatima	60	3 (40–52 years)	Matric	Housewife	40,000	Rent and husband's pension
4	Mother	Tonu	37	1 (12 years)	Master's	Housewife	35,000	Husband's job
	Grandmother	Mina	62	3 (29–41 years)	Matric	Housewife	25,000	Rent
5	Mother	Shoshi	48	2 (17 years twins)	HSC	Housewife	50,000	Husband's business
	Grandmother	Rehana	66	2 (45–48 years)	Grade 8	Housewife	100,000	Rent and husband's pension
6	Mother	Pinky	30	2 (1–7 years)	Master's	Housewife	50,000	Husband's job
	Grandmother	Jahan	49	3 (19–30 years)	SSC	Housewife	40,000	Rent
7	Mother	Piu	28	2 (3.5–8.5 years)	HSC	Housewife	45,000	Husband's job
	Grandmother	Amena	48	3 (17–28 years)	Grade 5	Housewife	32,000	Husband's job
8	Mother	Farida	46	2 (14–19 years)	Master's	Advocate	85,000	Rent, occupation, and husband's business
	Grandmother	Jobaida	80	9 (N/A)	Grade 5	Housewife	35,000	Rent

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9	Mother	Charu	48	2 (12–21 years)	Master's	Teacher	70,000	Rent, profession, and husband's job
	Grandmother	Khadija	66	2 (32–48 years)	< Grade 5	Housewife	25,000	Rent
10	Mother	Dina	34	2 (6–12 years)	Master's	Teacher	100,000	Occupation and husband's business
	Grandmother	Sharifa	51	4 (22–34 years)	Below matric	Housewife	50,000	Husband's job/pension
11	Mother	Jhumjhum	36	1 (12 years)	Master's	Banker	80,000	Occupation and husband's job
	Grandmother	Kahi	57	5 (22–38 years)	Below matric	Housewife	120,000	Rent and son's contribution

*Secondary School Certificate

** Higher Secondary School Certificate

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews in Bengali language from July 2017 to December 2017. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and the recorded interviews were translated, transliterated (Regmi et al. 2010), and transcribed (Duranti 2009) into English. Semantic (Chang et al. 1999) and cultural equivalence (Verkhovtsova 2023) was emphasized during the process. NVivo 10 software was used for data management. Data were analyzed inductively using the hermeneutic circle. I read and re-read the transcripts and field notes to understand the parts and wholes of the stories, and to generate initial codes. Then I categorized the initial codes based on similarities of function and perspectives. Reading and re-reading the initial code categories, texts, research aims, and research questions helped in generating broader themes, sub-themes, and interpretations of the meanings of participants' lived experiences. This process was repeated several times until finalizing the article. A research supervisor verified the themes and analysis. As a cultural insider, I used my foreknowledge in the data analysis process and was aware of altered perspectives and interpretations of the participants in the text. The research supervisor checked for personal biases throughout the analysis. Thus, I was constantly aware of researcher biases and was sensitive to the "alterity" of the text (Gadamer 2004, 268–273).

Research Ethics

This study secured ethics approval from the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, and University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Both verbal and written information regarding the study was provided to participants. Participants signed consent forms for study participation and audio recording of the interviews. Pseudonyms were used to ensure participants'

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confidentiality. Data were preserved in a password-protected computer. No monetary incentive was provided to research participants, but food was offered reciprocally as part of showing respect to the participants' culture of hospitality (Mookherjee 2008). This also helped build rapport. To prevent possible emotional harm to the participants, an arrangement was established with a government-funded trauma support and psychotherapy service center. Participants were offered the option of self-referral to the services upon demonstration of strong emotional reactions in the interview sessions.

Findings

Data suggest that participants constructed protective parenting practices when interacting with their mothers, husbands, family members, children, culture, and social contexts. Parental practices were constructed around children's physical, emotional, financial, behavioral, social, and spiritual well-being. Practices differed based on children's age and between generations. The participants' perceptions of contemporary society contextualized their constructions. Participants commonly practiced chaperonage, monitoring, selecting friends for children, arranging marriages, setting gendered boundaries, ensuring financial security, communicating, engineering fear, instilling religious values, and using traditional rituals to protect their children from harm.

"Good Company Makes One Good and Bad Company Damages"

This local proverb grounded the protective parenting construct of "Positive friendships cultivate growth, whereas negative ones cause harm," and the protective practice of monitoring children and their companions. This proverb emphasizes participants' efforts to guard their children's moral, habitual, and social safety in the community. Monitoring children's whereabouts and friends and connecting with friends' parents were practiced by both generations of mothers to protect their children from "bad company."

Sometimes, participants developed second-degree surveillance over their children by establishing relationships with neighboring peers and school guardians and connecting with children's friends. Two mothers (Charu and Farida) reported interviewing their children's friends about family backgrounds to assess whether they would be a good influence on their children. If the mothers were satisfied with these backgrounds, the mothers allowed their children to continue friendships, if not, they forced the children to disassociate. Farida established a friendly relationship with her son's friends to obtain daily information about her son and controlled his movements through directions given to those friends. When participants connected with the parents of their children's friends, they received the same responses in return.

Increased crime and substance abuse rates motivated G2 mothers to extend monitoring strategies, gendered boundaries, and the selection of friends. G2 mothers monitored children's

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use of communication technology. Farida (46 years old) shared about her strategies: "I always keep the TV and computer in my drawing room.…I place it in an open space so that I can keep an eye on them." In the context of technological advancement in the 2000s, G2 mothers appreciated the virtues of technology yet were apprehensive of the freedom of communication and access to media, viewing it as detrimental as it exposed children to unwanted and culturally unacceptable content and attitudes. As a result, mothers undertook measures to protect their children from harmful use of technology. Some mothers controlled the usage of computers, televisions, and cell phones, and monitored the content of their children's calls. Mobile phones were also a major tool for G2 mothers to monitor their children's whereabouts. Shoshi (47 years old) elaborated on how she uses mobile phones in her son's surveillance: "I check on my son's whereabouts by calling [him] on his mobile…I confirm whether he truly went to the coaching center by overhearing the teacher's and children's voices around him." The findings on this theme suggest that parents' vigilance was a norm.

Tradition Embodies Protective Wisdom

Participants constructed protective parenting with wisdom, tradition and culture, and an attitude of safeguarding children. The practices of chaperonage, arranging marriage, religious upbringing, instilling fear, and observing traditional rituals were formed in this effort. While chaperonage and arranged marriage addressed physical and social protection, religious upbringing, instilling fear, and use of traditional rituals were expected to address moral, habitual, and spiritual protection.

Chaperonage: "It Is Not a Solution, but A Protection"

Chaperonage refers to accompanying children to their daily activities. "It is not a solution, but a protection" (Tonu, a 37-year-old mother). G2 mothers accompanied children to protect them from sexual harassment, abduction, road accidents, and dog attacks. G2 mothers reported expending enormous effort into chaperonage, but G1 mothers did not report as much concern or effort in this regard. G1 mothers reported accompanying daughters only while sleeping at relatives' houses to protect them from sexual abuse. However, G1 mothers whose children recently graduated from school had similar concerns as G2 mothers. This was clearly articulated by Hena (a 69-year-old grandmother), "I didn't accompany the eldest two daughters to school…they went by themselves along with some friends…But I accompanied the youngest two. This custom started when the little ones started kindergarten."

Increased social insecurity and lack of mutual support in the community made a difference in the practice of chaperonage between G1 and G2 mothers. Daily news reports influenced mothers' risk constructions. When G1 mothers raised their children in the 1970s, social relationships were strong, and spontaneous neighborhood watches existed. This was

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unlike G2 mothers' experience in the 2000s. Pinky (a 29-year-old mother) reflected on the negative changes:

> During our time, people around us knew us. But at present, no one knows their neighbors. Like, I don't know the people next door. If someone does anything bad to me, there is no neighbor to shout at that person or say, "She is Mr. X's daughter or she lives there!" […] It was not like this during my growing-up time. I used to know everyone in our neighborhood. But my daughter does not even know how many people live in our building.

The G2 mothers accompanied their children from the first day of school through high school, and some even during their undergraduate years, and this was an enormous responsibility for participants in the absence of helping hands. Two G2 mothers quit their jobs, and another two did not seek any job despite financial hardship because no extended family member was available to accompany their children to school. The stay-at-home mothers' daily activities entailed ensuring a child's safety. Tonu (a 37-year-old mother) described her daily routine, "After having breakfast…like every day, I took him to the coaching center. I waited there. When his lessons ended, I dropped him off at school and came back home. Then I cooked quickly and went to pick up the boy."

Chaperonage as protective parenting demonstrated evidence of gendered roles in childcare. Mothers undertook the role of a constant protector, and their daily routine revolved around monitoring their children's safety, education, and daily activities. Mothers were expected to sacrifice their careers and personal time to ensure their children's well-being.

Arranged Marriage to Protect Children from Falling for the "Wrong" Partner

Arranging marriage was constructed as protective against marital crisis. Arranged marriage is a long-standing tradition. All the G1 and G2 mothers' marriages were arranged. Data suggests that G1 mothers enforced strict control over spouse selection, while G2 mothers were somewhat more flexible about children's choices. Even so, G2 mothers set predetermined criteria for a potential spouse, and if not met, the chosen partner would be rejected. The construction of protective parenting was linked to an expectation that children would trust parents' wisdom in spousal selection. Farida (a 46-year-old mother) reported how strict she was in her choice:

> My only tension is that they might fall for the wrong kind of girl. I told my boys, "I have no problem with you dating or liking someone, but make sure it's the right type of person." Also, I would never accept affairs between age-mates. I made it clear to them…I won't allow it.

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Use of Traditional Rituals

The performance of traditional rituals was constructed to be protective against supernatural dangers, one example being djinn (spirits who can possess humans). Performing traditional rituals was motivated by participants' protective attitudes and dedication to ensuring children's well-being. The participants believed in supernatural demonic spirits and their ability to harm pregnant women and newborns through generations. Rituals involved fire, salt, and restraining behaviors, and were specific to the child's developmental stages. Participants also believed that a mother's praise would harm children and reported the custom of not praising children in order to retain their good qualities.

The evening and nighttime were socially constructed to be dangerous in this regard. Families with a pregnant woman were only allowed to bring home fish and meat during the day. If fish or meat were brought in the evening, the family had to perform cleansing rituals to avoid being harmed by demonic spirits. Participants believed that evil spirits were attracted to sweets, fried food, and fish. To prevent harm to the fetus, newly purchased sweets or fried food were whirled through the fire before consumption. During Jhumjhum's (34-year-old mother) pregnancy, her mother, Kahi (57-year-old grandmother), instructed her to rest the groceries, fish, and meat for half an hour before handling, especially if brought after sunset. Kahi explained:

> Djinn stay with raw fish, meat, and chicken…After others take care of groceries, you will get close to that half an hour later…Do not eat those uncleansed foods immediately! If it is a fruit or fried snack, whirl it on the fire, nicely! Otherwise, it would be harmful to both you and the fetus.

There were also rituals to follow post-childbirth. The 57-year-old grandmother, Kahi, cautioned her daughter Jhumjhum, a nursing mother, "If you go outside alone, do not directly go to the baby after return! Wash your hands and face, put some salt into your mouth, and touch the fire! Then you will cool down and go to the child!" "The fear of negative impacts should be instilled in childhood through storytelling so that children internalize it" (Dali, a 50-year-old mother participant).

Social context and culturally grounded wisdom directed the participants to instill fear in children through communicating and presenting evidence so that children would restrain themselves from risky and unapproved behaviors. One such example was smoking. Both generations of mothers instilled fear to protect children from undesirable outcomes from those behaviors. The fear seems to have originated from the mothers' anxiety regarding children's safety, and mothers passed that on to their children. Two grandmothers, Hena and Fatima, instilled the fear of kidnapping in their daughters so that the daughters would return home before evening. Hena's daughter Dali (a 50-year-old mother) imitated her mother's strategy and implemented it on her son. Being aware of the prevalence of smoking and drug

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addiction among the younger generation, Dali was worried her son would be at risk of following suit. She used fear to prevent it, saying, "I always talked to him about ill health and cancer resulting from smoking, even during advertisement of cigarettes on TV…because once he develops a smoking addiction, it won't be possible to change…no one can change this."

Children Should Be Practitioners, but Not Extremists

Besides using fear, the participants also relied on religion to prevent undesirable habit formation in children. Religion in this community is constructed as a lifestyle. The participants engaged children in daily Islamic practices from pre-adolescence to build children's moral foundations against "derailment." This practice demonstrates the community's engagement and level of trust in religion. Regarding religion, Charu (a 48-year-old mother) articulated, "If they [her children] become fully detached from religion, they may go to the [wrong] tracks. Their mind may be diverted to something else." Dali emphasized the positive impact of religious practices, saying, "If a child prays five times salat, they grow good discipline!"

While the mothers were proactive in raising religious children, they were vigilant that children did not become extremists. Hena (a 69-year-old grandmother) identified extremism as one of the reasons to chaperone and monitor children. She made an example of a peer's child: "If she [a peer] had chaperoned her son from the beginning before finding out that the kid read Shibir's [Government-recognized extremist group] book, then he wouldn't have gone that far!"

Data indicates that in the construction of protective parenting, mothers had to contest against a child growing up as a religious extremist even as they encouraged them to be religious. Mothers were aware of the difference and managed to draw a line between the two. They took the necessary steps to achieve these goals.

Girls Are Susceptible to Violence

Both G1 and G2 mothers exercised gender boundaries as a protective parenting tool. Gendered boundaries were constructed around girls' vulnerability to sexual violence both in domestic and public spheres. Boys' vulnerabilities were underreported. Participants did not allow daughters to talk to male cousins in private, nor allowed visits to neighbors' or relatives' homes or sleepovers unless accompanied by the mother. Jobaida (an 80-year-old grandmother) was stricter. She did not let her daughters go outside in the afternoon, evening, or at night. Religious restrictions on mingling with the opposite gender beyond marriage reinforce these practices. Fatima (a 60-year-old grandmother) highlighted: "My father [and] my mother [were] Islamic minded…they used to tell me, 'Don't go to a house where a boy lives! Keep safe from boys, from men…!' Girls of my father's family didn't interact freely with boys."

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All participants in this study tended to reduce male contact with their daughters. For example, Hena (a 69-year-old grandmother) learned tailoring to avoid a male tailor taking her daughters' body measurements. Hena's daughter Dali (a 50-year-old mother) followed the same practice. Setting behavioral boundaries for girls is an example of gendered practices in the community. While they applied various restrictions on girls to protect them from men-perpetrated sexual violence, no participant reported their awareness about boys' vulnerability. None of the participants reported posing restrictions on boys, nor reported any parenting measures taken to prevent boys from becoming perpetrators of sexual violence.

Financial Resources Are Vital for a Better Future

Financial planning was viewed as a tool to secure children's future and to protect them from the effects of financial crises. Mothers invested in career-based higher education for their children and supported the expenses of children's major life events such as weddings, which were culturally determined responsibilities of parents. Data revealed sacrifices made by parents and the range of financial protection they provided to their children. They began financial planning in their early lives, reflecting a shared value across generations. Jhumjhum (a 34-year-old mother) began purchasing jewelry for her future daughter-in-law before her son turned 10, albeit acknowledging that "city-boys" usually get married after securing a stable income. She said, "His [son's] father wants to make him a pilot, and a certain amount of money is already saved for that…I have planned to arrange my son's wedding more luxuriously…I started to make gold ornaments bit by bit…because I cannot buy [them] all at once."

While parents saved money for children's future needs, they traditionally limited young children's direct access to money to prevent them from derailment. Establishing children's financial security was an ingredient of their peace and pleasure. The traditional social system in Bangladesh discourages individual identity in favor of family identity. Resultantly, other family members share financial responsibilities for one member. A G1 participant, Kahi (57 years old), highlighted that spending savings on children's weddings was a norm, "I saved money tolerating a lot of hardships. Then I arranged my daughters' weddings…I spent all the remaining money on my youngest son's wedding…The lion's share was contributed by my elder son; then by me and my daughters."

Tara (a 56-year-old grandmother) envisioned financial security for her grandchildren through investing in her children's education and promising careers. This indicates that a mother's concern was not limited to her children but also extended to grandchildren. Tara said, "If our children do well, they will be able to make their children do well. If they study well, learn well, and do a good job, they will be able to mold their children…I also think of their children…I want them to live affluently."

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Discussion and Conclusion

This study's findings revealed four constructions of protective parenting, supported by eight protective parenting practices identified across two generations of Bangladeshi mothers. Protectiveness was found to be a prominent parenting value, which echoes the findings of Horwath et al. (2008), where Bangladeshi participants reported constant concerns about children's safety. By analyzing and comparing the philosophies of the eight protective parenting practices with each parenting dimension of the theoretical framework, a clear connection to the conventional parenting theories is established.

The protective parenting practices found in this study transcend the five theoretically grounded parenting dimensions: warmth, proximity, communication, demandingness, and discipline. Protective parenting strategies evolved out of parental love and sacrifice. These strategies have elements of demandingness where they engage children's lifestyles and choices. Demandingness is expressed through mothers' commands over children's friends and spouse selection. Chaperonage illustrates the proximity dimension, and the practice of engineering fear encompasses components of the communication dimension. The disciplinary dimension of parenting manifests in mothers' enforcement of various rules and gendered boundaries. Thus, the protective parenting of Bangladeshi mothers emerges as a distinct phenomenon, heavily influenced by values, culture, and social context.

No available definition is comprehensive enough to explain the type of protective parenting practices found in this study. Therefore, based on this study, I define protective parenting practice as culturally and contextually grounded practices that parents learn from earlier generations and adapt according to emerging needs of ensuring safety and security for their children in various aspects including physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and financial. This definition encompasses the interpersonal, social, and cognitive aspects and culture-grounded elements of protective parenting practices.

While my definition emphasizes the interpersonal, social, cultural, and cognitive aspects of protective parenting practices, Bakermans-Kranenburg and van IJzendoorn (2017) focuses solely on the evolutionary aspect. However, Mowder (2005) asserts that the protective characteristics of parents change over time in response to personal experiences, child characteristics, and the cultural milieu. My definition partially aligns with that of Mowder (2005), who accounts for personal, interpersonal, and cultural aspects.

Due to its social and cultural aspects, protective parenting practices appear differently across cultures, and even differently across time periods and contexts within the same culture. This study supports this, particularly in the case of chaperonage and monitoring practices. While protective parenting practices were primarily learned from earlier generations (Jasmine et al. 2025), Bangladeshi mothers adapted child-protective strategies based on social insecurity and traditions.

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Social insecurity in Dhaka can be attributed to modernization-generated social changes (Khan et al. 2014). While modernization affords opportunities, education, technology, and structural development, it also brings compounded crime. Crimes and the number of strangers have been amplified in the neighborhoods of Dhaka due to increased internal migrations (Islam et al. 2022) of opportunity seekers. Ineffective policy provisions, failure in policy applications, and a deficient law enforcement system caused a crime surge in Dhaka (Akter and Aziz 2020; Hasan and Khatun 2020; The World Bank 2007). All these factors potentially contributed to parents' apprehension of victimization, which motivates practices of chaperonage, monitoring, communication, and instilling fear in children (Skogan 2012).

The practice of chaperonage appeals to three levels. Firstly, on an individual level, it denotes intense feelings of social insecurity among parents. Secondly, at the community level, it signals parents' struggles against social insecurity. Thirdly, at the societal level, it demonstrates unequal gender roles. With these three levels of appeal, the findings on chaperonage as a protective parenting practice are powerful.

Social insecurity-persuaded needs for chaperonage pressure mothers to be available for children's daily activities. Culture expects that women would sacrifice their careers to support children. In combined effect, this potentially impedes progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which is to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations General Assembly 2017, 18). Thus, this study calls for efforts to deal with social insecurity to support Bangladesh's achievement of SDGs.

Monitoring as a protective parenting strategy has been found effective in lessening behavioral problems when practiced in high-risk neighborhoods. Ahmed and Hossain (2015), and Pugh and Richter (2023) found monitoring to be effective in mitigating substance abuse risks. Rodríguez-Meirinhos et al. (2020) and Velazquez et al. (2023) reported an association between constant monitoring and lower incidence of substance abuse, and children's lower involvement in risky behaviors. Future research can explore the effectiveness and implication of monitoring on children and parents in Dhaka.

Bangladeshi mothers used traditions and wisdom in their efforts in arranged marriage, religious upbringing, saving money, imposing gendered boundaries, and observing traditional rituals to protect their children from harm. Modernization changed the society and social relations (Khan et al. 2014), yet arranged marriage remains customary in Bangladesh (Peterson et al. 2011) and the Indian subcontinent (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). It is customary that there be an age gap between spouses in Bangladeshi marriages, where the wife ought to be younger than the husband. This is due to a belief that an age gap facilitates women's respect toward a husband. Furthermore, there is a belief that women age faster than men and that a wife must be younger than her husband in order to care for him in his old age. However, parents have begun taking interpersonal compatibility into account (Allendorf and Pandian 2016; Fuller and Narasimhan 2008). Literature suggests recent changes in children's use of their agency to negotiate their preferences with parents (Allendorf and

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Pandian 2016; Schaffnit et al. 2023). This supports the findings that G1 mothers allowed children to choose a partner within parents' predetermined criteria, and this change might have occurred as an impact of modernization. Research on arranged marriage as a protective parenting strategy would unfold the aspects parents intend to protect children from in married lives, how young people use their own agency and partner compatibility.

The efforts of mothers within this study to provide financial protection to their children resonate with the sentiment of a communal culture where siblings and extended family members also participate in the effort (Khaliq 2022; Della Puppa and Ambrosini 2022; Schaffnit et al. 2023). This practice was constructed in the absence of structural financial support systems in the country, such as wedding finance, unemployment benefits, government housing, childcare, free healthcare, or support for educational expenses. Literature suggests that financial support between parents and children is mutual in Bangladeshi families. Traditionally, adult sons take over the financial responsibilities for the extended family from their fathers (Jasmine and Nduna 2022). Daughters have also started to contribute (White 2007). Through mutual support, Bangladeshi families try to beat the lack of structural support.

Gendered norms and practices informed by religion are evident in Bangladeshi societies starting from jurisdiction to education, marriage, employment, and health (Adams 2015; Ferdous and Mallick 2019; Lata et al. 2021; Robin et al. 2019). Gender boundaries in protective parenting are not a discrete matter, and has been informed by Quranic verses (for example, Qur'an 33:32, 53, and 59; 24:31; Shaheen International 2004) that encourage both men and women to maintain distance (Qur'an 33:32) and pose restrictions on interaction between a woman and non-related men (Qur'an 33:53; Shaheen International 2004) and girls maintaining a veil as an attire to protect themselves by hiding their attractiveness from men (Qur'an 33:59 and 24:31; Shaheen International 2004) Among the eight protective parenting practices, participants related two protective practices with the religion they followed, which was Islam. Quranic references are available in support of restriction in mixing of women and non-related men (Qur'an 33:32, 53 and 59; 24:31; Shaheen International 2004) and training children in religious practices (Qur'an 20:132; Shaheen International 2004). However, misinterpretation of the Quranic verses and the society misusing the verses in suppressing and depriving women of their rights, education, and professional development has been reported in literature (Kabeer 1991; Murshid 1997; Patoari 2019; Hannan 2016). A close examination is required to reveal how Islam is shaping the protective parenting practice of Bangladeshi mothers and the protective practices of setting social and behavioral boundaries for girls. This study finds persisting gender barriers for women in terms of free movement and pursuing careers. While gender boundaries are identified as protective parenting tools aiming to ensure girls' safety, literature reported those boundaries affecting girls' maternal health and access to healthcare in Bangladesh (Ahmed et al. 2021; Robin et al. 2019). These two findings bring to a logical estimation that social insecurity and culture-motivated gender

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barriers are potentially contributing to persistent inequalities in healthcare access. Thus, they potentially erode the achievement of SDG 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" (United Nations General Assembly 2017, 16).

In this study, boundaries, as a protective parenting tool, were found to be mostly applied to girls. While boys were regarded as a potential danger to girls, they were found to be excused from limit setting or moral training, preventing them from developing abusive behavior. Girls were constructed as weak and easy to victimize in this society. Further research may address whether the gender boundaries found in this study narrowed girls' space to grow and access opportunities. Furthermore, the high incidences of gender-based violence and sexual abuse of women by acquaintances (54.4%, Tithila 2020) and non-family members (83%, Fattah and Kabir 2013) contradicts the intensive and extensive protective parenting practices. Therefore, a concern is raised about the effectiveness and long-term outcome of the identified protective practices.

South Asian parents, including Bangladeshi parents, embrace religion as a way of life for children to enable them to differentiate between right and wrong, to promote specific behavioral guidelines, restrain bad behavior, and thus limit troubles in life (Franceschelli and O'Brien 2014). This study's findings support these assertions. Commitment to religion is also found to be protective against adult-onset drinking (Cheng and Lo 2018), juvenile substance abuse, and criminal offenses; however, disagreements remain regarding the "when" and "how" of the process (Saladino et al. 2024).

Traditional ceremonies are often compared with religions (Wati et al. 2019). The findings of this study suggest that both generations of Bangladeshi mothers constructed traditional rituals as pre- and post-natal protective tools. Sociologists in the Indian subcontinent and Bangladesh report that people believe in supernatural powers such as ghosts, djinn, and spirits, and that they perform rituals to protect children from intangible harm (Blum et al. 2009; Kakar 1979; Karmakar and Khan 2023; Winch et al. 2005). The findings of this study align with the available studies by revealing mothers' beliefs in supernatural powers, notably the use of fire and salt.

Fear is a powerful tool of control. The framework, architecture, iconography, and targets of fear are important in this regard (Altheide 2002). The mothers' intergenerational use of fear to control children's movements and habitual behavior elucidated in this study aligns with the historic use of fear to control societies (Altheide 2002). It is a matter of further research whether mothers' effort to generate fear in children is a transfer of parents' fear and apprehension originating from children's safety concerns in an insecure social context.

Selecting friends for children, arranged marriages, and ensuring financial security supports the culture of shared lifestyle in Bangladesh. In this context, children's personal space and decision-making go underrecognized until children's young adulthood, and family interest supersedes individual agency. However, globalization, media, and technology, an outcome of modernization, are wielding intense influence on third-generation children,

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contributing to a generation gap between parents and children, shaping their sense of freedom (Habib et al. 2018), expression of opinion and personal boundaries (Yousuf 2023), and obedience to parents (Yousuf and Yousuf 2023). Resultantly, chaperonage and extensive monitoring of children might be perceived as parental intrusion and control, while the perception of control potentially generates parent–child conflicts (Fung et al. 2017; Gooman et al. 2012). Therefore, children exposed to globalization may substantially differ in responding to authority and protective measures of parents and grandparents. An in-depth investigation is warranted to reveal the implications of protective parenting practices for third-generation children.

The array of protective parenting practices reflects historical and contemporary safety concerns of parenting in Dhaka. Along with maternal grandmothers' influence (Jasmine et al. 2025), social insecurity was found to shape protective parenting practices, and impacted children's social and family lives, parents' careers, and financial planning. Besides, the impact of urbanization and globalization is traced in the shift from absolute arranged marriage to children's use of agencies, initiation of the practice of chaperonage, monitoring of children's use of phones and computers, and extensive monitoring of children's whereabouts out of a concern of substance use.

Social contexts, traditions, cultural beliefs, and modernization contributed to the construction of protective parenting practices of Bangladeshi mothers. The findings highlight Bangladeshi mothers' compliance with cultural beliefs and traditional practices and stress the importance of social context and culture in understanding parenting. This study also reflects on a mother's extensive involvement in children's lives and establishes protectiveness as a parenting value of Bangladeshi mothers across generations. The exploration of protective parenting practices assisted in identifying threats and risks to children in Dhaka and parents' concerns for children's well-being. Therefore, this study is valuable for researchers, policymakers, and implementers for effective policy formulation and implementation. Here, highlighted is the need to develop effective social safety policies that incorporate the administration, community organizations, and residents' representatives to address the current demand for parental protection in raising children.

This article contributes to Indigenous knowledge and global parenting literature by identifying protective parenting practices, attitudes, the social and cultural context of those practices, and the definition of protective parenting practices. Furthermore, in presenting a parenting dimensions-based theoretical framework, this study contributes to the discourse of research methodology by offering a theory-based structure for understanding parenting practices—the structural components of parenting dimensions. This study conveys implications for offering parenting interventions to render such programs more culturally appropriate. It is important to note that Dhaka is unique in risks and opportunities, as well as in its social, economic, legal, and developmental parameters. Hence, protective parenting practices in Dhaka might not be inferred to other locations of the country.

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Strength of the Study

In the scarcity of research revealing contextual parenting in Bangladesh, this study is a pioneer in exploring the protective parenting practices embedded in the socio-cultural background as well as in the inevitable influence of globalization and modernization. This study provides a baseline to engage with epistemic discourse around parenting, child development, and parent–child relationships in Bangladesh. However, except for the traditional rituals during pre- and post-natal periods, this study did not outline age-specific protective parenting practices, which are imperative to developmental psychology. Another limitation of this study is that it did not reflect on the impact of education on protective parenting practices. Future studies may research how parents' education levels and children's ages shape the protective parenting practices of Bangladeshi mothers.

Policy and Research Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, I recommend formatting social safety policies and generating specific strategies to reduce social insecurity and increase social protection for better achievement of several SDGs: gender equality, women's empowerment, education and culture, care services, reduced inequalities, health, and justice. I also recommend that future studies include fathers, grandfathers, paternal grandmothers, and other contributing family members as participants. Since extended family members contribute to and influence parenting in Bangladesh (Jasmine et al. 2025), the complete spectrum of protective parenting practices might not have been reported here, as this study only included mothers and maternal grandmothers as participants. In addition, focused studies on protective parenting in other parts of the country would help in understanding the overall nature of protective parenting practices of Bangladeshi mothers.

Acknowledgment

The support of the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Human Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in the Republic of South Africa, toward this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not to be attributed to the CoE in Human Development. My gratitude goes to my supervisor, Professor Mzikazi Nduna, for guiding me throughout the development of the article. I am sincerely thankful to Wacango Kimani from Wits Writing Centre for coaching me in academic writing. The research participants gave their valuable time and shared personal experiences, which made this study possible.

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AI Acknowledgment

Generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were not used in any way to prepare, write, or complete essential authoring tasks in the manuscript. The author confirms that they are the sole author of this article and takes full responsibility for the content therein, as outlined in COPE recommendations.

Informed Consent

The author has obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

All relevant data are available at Jasmine, Umme H. 2025. "Coded Interview Excerpts About Protective Parenting Practices in Dhaka, Bangladesh." Qualitative Data Repository: QDR Main Collection. V1. https://doi.org/10.5064/F6BBLHIM.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Umme Habiba Jasmine: PhD Candidate, Department of Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa
Email: uhjasm@gmail.com

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