GASLIGHTING, PARENTING STYLES, AND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the level of gaslighting, parenting style, and mental health of secondary school students in Malaysia. Gaslighting, as a hidden form of psychological manipulation, can have a negative impact on the mental well-being of adolescents. Parenting styles, especially those of a negative nature such as authoritarian and permissive, have also been identified as risk factors for mental health problems. A total of 273 secondary school students in the Petaling Perdana district, Malaysia were selected as respondents to this study. Data were collected using questionnaires consisting of the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ), Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), and Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21). Descriptive analysis is used to analyse the data. The results showed that the mental health of pupils was reported to be at a normal level, however, there were a large number of those who experienced higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Gaslighting among secondary school students has been detected to be at an alarming level and needs to be paid attention to by the relevant authorities. Authoritative parenting style is described as the most dominant parenting style practice among parents of secondary school students. The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of family relationships that affect adolescent mental health and can be used to plan more effective interventions and support programmes.

Keywords: gaslighting, parenting style, mental health, secondary school students, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

1. INTRODUCTION

A dramatic increase in the number of cases of mental patients has been recorded since 2019 and a total of 970 million people worldwide suffer from mental health problems to this day. Mental health refers to an individual's well-being that allows them to cope with life's stressors, realize their potential, work productively, and contribute to society (WHO, 2007; NIH, 2023; Ministry of Health, 2012; . This definition is endorsed by various organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Mental Health Policy, and the Malaysian Psychiatric Association, which emphasise the importance of mental health for individual well-being and national development. Findings from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that one in eight individuals suffer from mental disorders worldwide. According to the WHO, 17% of the affected population is between the ages of 10 and 19. Mental illness is estimated to account for 16% of the global burden of illness and injury among this age group. The

National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) (2023) revealed that one million or equivalent to 4.6% of Malaysians over the age of 15 suffer from depression. According to the results of the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS), the number has doubled compared to 2019, especially in the 16 to 29-year-old group. In 2002, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Unit of Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (HUKM) recorded a total of 1,550 cases of patients aged 10 to 16 years who suffered from various emotional and behavioural problems, including psychosis, autism, depression, behavioural disorders, school rejection, hyperactivity, and anxiety (Zasmani Shafiee, 2003).

The National Mental Health Policy states that mental health is the level of ability of individuals, groups and environments to interact with each other in order to build a good level of well-being, an effective relationship towards the achievement of individual and group goals in a fair manner (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2012). Therefore, in line with the government's intention to ensure that the mental health of the people is in a satisfactory condition, further research needs to be enhanced regarding the mental health of students in secondary schools. In line with WHO's desire to make well-being and mental health a priority for all, the Malaysian Psychiatric Association (MPA) supports the WHO's statement that the well-being and mental health of an individual is very important in the effort to produce good citizens who are able to contribute to the country. On the other hand, long-lasting mental problems without appropriate intervention will lead these individuals to various other problems such as issues related to the abuse of illegal substances, alcohol and nicotine, self-harming behaviours such as self-harm or suicide attempts. Therefore, collaboration with government agencies, influencers and other stakeholders needs to be enhanced and the community needs to work together to figure out ways to change mindsets in addressing this issue of mental health and well-being.

Although various studies have examined the relationship between parenting style and adolescent mental health, the phenomenon of gaslighting in the family context still receives little attention in Malaysia (Adnan et al., 2014; Sivasanthni, 2021). Gaslighting, as a subtle and often unconscious form of manipulation, poses unique challenges in its identification and measurement, especially in the context of Malaysian culture that tends to prioritise family harmony and respect parental authority. Furthermore, past studies have shown that certain parenting styles, such as authoritarian and permissive styles, have the potential to increase the risk of mental health problems in adolescents (Baumrind, 1966). However, there are no studies that specifically examine the interaction between gaslighting, parenting styles, and the mental health of secondary school students in Malaysia. The absence of such studies poses a significant knowledge gap, given that a comprehensive understanding of the issue is important to plan appropriate interventions and support programmes to protect the mental well-being of adolescents. Russell et al. (2010) noted that there is a significant relationship between parenting style and various aspects of child development, including academic performance, problem-solving skills, risky behaviors, mental health, self-esteem, and depression.

Studies show that adolescent behavioral changes and mental well-being are influenced by a variety of factors in the family environment, including parenting styles, interpersonal relationships with parents, conflicts between parents, and the mental health of the parents themselves (Fordham & Kennedy, 2017; Teoh & Rose, 2001). Neglect of adolescents' mental health can have long-lasting

negative effects on their physical and mental well-being into adulthood. Mental health disorders can appear in many forms, including depression, anxiety, stress, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, and schizophrenia. Gaslighting is one of the causes that can cause this disorder.

Gaslighting is a type of psychological manipulation of a person over a long period of time that causes the victim to doubt the validity of their own thoughts, notions of reality or memories (Stern, R. 2018). It is an attempt to convince the victim that they are not someone trustworthy. Once the victim accepts the statement as a "fact", the perpetrator can use this situation to their advantage, especially by avoiding responsibility for their own behavior and controlling the victim's behavior (Willis K. et al., 2023). According to Baumrind (1966), gaslighting in other forms of psychological manipulation can also occur where a person or group of people covertly plant seeds of doubt in the targeted individual or group, making them question their own memory, perception, or sanity. It can occur in a variety of interpersonal relationships, including those between parents and children. Usually, gaslighting can lead to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of emotional or mental stability, and dependence on the abuser (*gaslighter*).

Studies related to gaslighting, parenting styles and mental health are very important for the improvement of knowledge in the fields of family psychology, child and adolescent development, as well as mental health. It is able to provide an understanding of the relationship between unhealthy parenting practices such as gaslighting and parenting styles and children's mental health. This study can also provide useful and detailed information about gaslighting which is a new term for our country's society. The purpose of this study is to see the impact on the well-being and mental health of secondary school students and to find appropriate solutions in dealing with the problems that occur. A comprehensive understanding of gaslighting, is able to change the parenting style of children. In turn, it can create a mentally and physically healthy generation as a whole. This study also makes important contributions both academically and practically. Academically, it enriches knowledge about gaslighting, parenting styles, and adolescent mental health, and can be a reference for the development of further research theories and methodologies. In practice, this article raises awareness about gaslighting, provides guidance for parents, and can serve as a basis for the development of intervention programs, prevention, and the formulation of policies and practices related to adolescent mental health.

Based on the objectives of the study, there are several relevant research questions has been formed:
  i.   What are the mental health levels of secondary school students?
 ii.   What are the gaslighting levels of secondary school students?
iii.   What are the parenting style practices of secondary school students?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Mental Health of Secondary School Students

Adolescent mental health is a critical issue that requires serious attention. Adolescence is a transitional phase full of challenges, including physical, emotional, and social changes. Various studies have documented an increase in the rate of mental health problems among adolescents, including in Malaysia (Adnan et al., 2014; Sivasanthni, 2021; Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2023).

The mental health of secondary school students in Malaysia is an issue of increasing concern and relevance to this study. Local studies by Adnan et al. (2014) and Sivasanthni (2021) have reported an increase in mental health problems such as anxiety and depression among adolescents, including secondary school students. Findings from the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2023 also confirm this trend, with the highest rate of mental health problems recorded among 16-19 year olds. In the context of the study, the issue of mental health of secondary school students is the main focus as it is potentially influenced by factors such as gaslighting and parenting styles. Academic stress, social relationships, family issues, and hormonal changes experienced by adolescents at this age can increase their risk of developing mental health problems. A study by Balan & Alfred (2013) showed that the mental health of students is also related to academic performance, school attendance, and the risk of engaging in risky behaviors. Therefore, understanding how gaslighting and parenting styles affect the mental health of secondary school students is important to plan appropriate interventions and supports to improve their wellbeing. Therefore, it is important to pay serious attention to the mental health issues of secondary school students in Malaysia and implement comprehensive preventive measures and interventions.

According to Gupta (1993), mental health refers to the normal state of a person without mental problems, who live in harmony and with a goal. Good mental health allows individuals to deal with life's stressors positively and calmly. Mental health affects an individual's thinking, behavior, feelings, decision-making ability, problem-solving, and social interaction (Abdul Rashid et al., 2020). Individuals with a good level of well-being and mental health are able to develop emotionally and cognitively, form effective social relationships with others and are able to deal with any problems well (National Health and Morbidity Survey, 2019).

Mental health needs to be given special attention by the government and relevant agencies. The findings of the NHMS (2023) show an alarming increase in mental health problems in Malaysia, especially among adults and children. One in six children aged 5 to 15 suffer from mental health problems, an increase compared to 2019. Mental health problems in children include behavioral, emotional, hyperactive, and problems with peers. Stress at school, family problems, and excessive use of social media are among the factors identified. Only 10% of those with mental health problems seek professional treatment or support. The shortage of mental health specialists, societal stigma, and high treatment costs are major barriers. Ministry Of Health is working to address this issue through various initiatives, but more diligent efforts are needed from all parties to raise awareness, access to services, and reduce stigma against mental health.

2.2. Gaslighting

Sweet defines gaslighting as a form of psychological manipulation that aims to make gaslighting victims feel skeptical about their own reality and sanity. It is a form of psychological manipulation carried out by a person or group in an interpersonal relationship. Gaslighting can occur in a variety of relationships, including parent-child relationships either consciously or unconsciously (2019). The behavior of parents who frequently act rudely to show dominance and frequently blame the child, can slowly and surely have a negative impact on the child. Gaslighting in parenting styles, where parents doubt or deny a child's experience, can cause children to feel confused, lose confidence, and feel unappreciated. According to Stern, gaslighting in parenting encompasses

manipulative actions aimed at misleading children, creating uncertainty, and undermining their confidence in reality (Stern, 2018). The findings of this study by Stern (2018) also identify various gaslighting tactics used by perpetrators, such as denial, distortion of facts, and insults. Stern also discusses the effects of gaslighting on victims, including loss of self-confidence, depression, anxiety, and social isolation. A study by Sweet (2019) examines how gaslighting operates in a broader social context and how it can affect individuals and groups. Määttä and Uusiautti (2021) conducted a systematic survey and meta-analysis to examine the relationship between parental psychological control and social process problems in adolescents. This study shows that parental psychological control, which is a form of manipulation similar to gaslighting, is associated with increased social process problems in adolescents, such as depression and anxiety.

The study of gaslighting in the family context in Malaysia, particularly involving secondary school students and its relation to parenting styles and mental health in general, is insufficient to provide a comprehensive explanation of the problems studied. Therefore, several gaps need to be filled in the context of the study, including broadening the context of gaslighting studies by not only focusing on gaslighting in romantic relationships or work environments. Specific studies on the effects of gaslighting on secondary school students, need to be improved. A more comprehensive study, which examines gaslighting in the context of families, parenting styles, and the mental health of secondary school students simultaneously, needs to be implemented as well as possible.

2.3. Parenting style

Parenting styles play a crucial role in adolescent development, influencing various aspects including academic achievement, problem-solving skills, risky behaviors, mental health, self-esteem, and depression (Russell et al., 2010). Parenting style refers to the various methods or means used by parents in educating their children. Baumrind (1967) categorizes parenting styles into three main types, namely authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. The style is categorized based on the level of familiarity and control that parents give to their children (Omar et al., 2012). Parental upbringing is an important factor in the formation of children's self-concept and personality, which affects the development of their mentality, traits, interests, tendencies, and attitudes (Scott, 1983; Faziha, 2009). In Malaysia, a special focus on the role of parents has been given by the 9th Shift in the Malaysia Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013 to 2025 where parents are the closest friends in the home to encourage the excellence of their children (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Mistakes in educating children can bring losses to the individual, family, society and even the country, at the same time can lead to a huge negative impact on children's emotions and mental development such as lack of affection, emotional instability, feeling inferior, having discipline problems and so on.

Parents are the individuals closest to their children and play an important role in the family institution (Faziha Diana, 2009). The parenting style practiced by every parent (Wan Anita, 2016) plays an important role in educating and raising children (Nurul Izzati & Manisah Mohd Ali, 2021). The way parents interact and respond to children's behavior shapes their parenting style. Baumrind (1966) classifies parenting styles into two main dimensions, namely *responsiveness* and *demandingness. Responsiveness* is characterized by openness, cooperation, and calmness. Responsive parents encourage children to freely express their opinions and express themselves.

Demandingness is also characterized by many demands, pressures, and strict supervision. Demanding parents set high expectations and monitor all the activities of their children.

Baumrind (1967) introduced a model of parenting styles that included three main types: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. The authoritative style is characterized by a balance between parental assertiveness and openness to children's views, as well as an attitude of actively helping and educating. A study by Samsiah M.J, et al (2015) showed that authoritative parenting styles provide a variety of positive effects on a child's development, including better academic achievement, improved skills, independence, self-confidence, and good mental well-being. The authoritarian style, on the other hand, is characterized by high expectations of parents for their children, accompanied by a strict approach to control, punishment, and non-negotiable rules. On the other hand, permissive styles are characterized by being overly indulgent and fulfilling children's desires without setting clear boundaries or rules (Baumrind, 1991) Rohaty (1998) summarizes these three styles by stating that some parents prefer to punish, some are more democratic and talkative, while others are passive without taking a firm stance on children's behavior. Mohd Haikal et. al (2014) and Anuar Adnan et.al (2014) found that authoritative parenting styles have a negative association with adolescent depression, when adolescents with authoritative parents tend to have lower rates of depression. On the other hand, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are associated with an increased risk of depression in adolescents. Adolescents who grew up with this parenting style tended to experience higher levels of depression than those who grew up with an authoritative style. Authoritative styles, which balance assertiveness with support and openness, have been shown to reduce the risk of depression in adolescents. Therefore, it is important for parents to choose an appropriate and effective parenting style, such as an authoritative style, to ensure the healthy mental well-being and development of adolescents.

A study by Adnan et al. (2014) found that authoritative parenting styles, characterized by support, warmth, and the setting of clear boundaries, were associated with lower levels of depression among adolescents. A study by Sivasanthni (2021) shows that authoritative parenting styles are negatively associated with truancy in school, which indirectly reflects a better level of mental health. Lamborn et al. (1991) reported that adolescents from families with authoritative parenting styles tended to have better competence and adaptation than adolescents from families with other parenting styles. Darling and Steinberg, (1993) emphasized that parenting style is an important context that interacts with other factors in influencing children's development. According to Russell et al., (2010), there is a strong relationship in children's parenting and self-esteem styles including academic performance, problem-solving skills, risky behaviours, mental health, self-esteem and depression.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Design

In this study, the researcher chose quantitative study as the approach in conducting the study. The researcher chose a survey study aimed at using questionnaires. The data collection method is carried out online, using *a google form*. The survey design was chosen because it allows for the

collection of extensive data from large populations in a short period of time and at a low cost (Creswell, 2014).

3.2. Population and Sampling

The stratified random sampling method was used to select the study samples. Before sampling was made, the population was divided into several groups or strata based on sex and race. This method is used because it can provide a more accurate estimate. This technique ensures that each group of characteristics to be studied is present in the sample. The study population consisted of 747 Form 4 students from four secondary schools in the Petaling Perdana district. The selection of respondents from secondary school students was made by taking into account that students at the secondary school level experience various conflicts and changes in social, physical, emotional and other contexts. They are categorised as teenagers who we know are privileged and unique (Azizi Yahaya & Jaafar Sidek Latif, 2005). The sample of the study was 273 Form 4 students, the majority of whom were Malays, Chinese and Indians. Schools in Petaling Perdana are in the grade A group with a total of more than 1000 students. This area is a fairly large urban area where the population is made up of various races. Therefore, the selection of schools in this district to carry out the study is timely and very appropriate.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

At the initial stage, permission to conduct the study was applied for in the Application System for Conducting Online Education Research version 2.0 (eRAS 2.0) under the management of the Education Policy Planning and Research Division (BPPDP), Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), Selangor State Education Department (JPNS) and Petaling Perdana District Education Office (PPD). After obtaining permission to conduct research in schools, the researchers contact the school directly. With the help of school counselling teachers, the questionnaire instrument in the form of *Google Form* was successfully disseminated online to classroom teachers to be administered to Form 4 students for each selected secondary school in the Petaling Perdana district. The time frame for data collection is around four weeks.

3.4. Study instruments

This study uses a questionnaire as a research instrument. The selection of the right and appropriate instrument is important to ensure that the data and information obtained are consistent with the objectives, questions and hypotheses of the study. Donkor (2018) stated that the use of questionnaires is very appropriate to obtain data appropriately. The questionnaire in this study consists of 4 parts, namely Part A, Part B, Part C and Part D. The arrangement and division of the construct are briefly illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Questionnaire Content

Part	Questionnaire Content	Number of Items

A	Respondent Demographic Data	2
B	Mental Health (DASS-21)	21
C	Gaslighting (VGQ)	14
D	Gaya Kibobapan (Pak)	30
Sum		**67**

The demographic section of the respondents contains 2 items that aim to obtain information about the background of the respondents. There are several items that respondents need to select and fill in.

Table 2: Demographic Data of Respondents

Questionnaire	Scale	Number of Items
Respondent Demographic Data	Gender	1
	Family	1
Sum		**2**

3.5. Mental Health Instrument (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21)

The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) is a widely used self-assessment tool to measure negative emotional states such as depression, anxiety, and stress. DASS-21 was developed by Peter Lovibond, (1988) and has been translated into various languages including Bahasa Malaysia. It consists of 21 items assessed using a four-point Likert scale. The DASS-21 has three subscales that measure different aspects of emotions. The depression subscale assesses feelings of hopelessness, decreased value in life, loss of interest, and inability to experience pleasure. The anxiety subscale assesses physiological stimuli, muscle tension, and subjective experiences associated with anxiety. The stress subscale assesses feelings of nervousness, difficulty relaxing, irritability, and impatience.

DASS-21 has been recognized by experts and is widely used in various studies to measure the psychological aspects of individuals (Ramli, Rosnani & Aidil Faszrul, 2012). The American Psychological Association (APA) recognizes the DASS-21 as a valid and reliable measure for assessing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. The Malaysian Psychiatric Association (MPA) recommends the use of DASS-21 as an aid in the diagnosis and assessment of mental health problems. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health (MOH) uses DASS-21 in some of their mental health programmes, such as the National Mental Health Programme. Thus, DASS-21 has been widely used in scientific studies in Malaysia and around the world. This indicates that this measure is widely accepted by the scientific community as a legitimate and reliable tool for assessing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. The reliability and validity of this tool have been proven in a variety of contexts, making it a valuable instrument in research and clinical practice. The selection of this instrument is very appropriate and coincides to measure the mental health of secondary school students, namely stress, anxiety and depression.

Table 3: Mental Health Instruments (DASS-21)

Questionnaire	Indicator	Number of Items
Mental Health (DASS-21)	Stress	7
	Anxiety	7
	Depression	7
Sum		21

3.6. Gaslighting Instrument (VGQ)

The Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ) is an instrument used to assess the extent to which an individual is a victim of gaslighting. The VGQ consists of a number of statements that reflect the feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that the victim of gaslighting may be experiencing. Respondents were asked to rate how often they experienced or felt these things. VGQ can help mental health professionals to identify individuals who may be victims of gaslighting and provide appropriate support. In addition, VGQ can also be used in research to study the effects of gaslighting on mental health. Therefore, the selection of this instrument coincided with the question of the study.

While VGQ is a useful tool, it is important to remember that it is only a screening aid and not a substitute for professional diagnosis. VGQ consists of 14 items that were selected according to the suitability of the study by adapting items from the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire instrument, K.H. Shuja, M. Aqeel, (2021). It is assessed using the five-point Likert Scale. All items have been adapted and translated into Bahasa Malaysia. VGQs have been developed and tested extensively in a variety of contexts, including interpersonal and family relationships. Past studies have shown that VGQ has high reliability and validity in measuring gaslighting experience (Sweet, 2019).

Jadual 4: Gaslighting Instrument (VGQ)

Questionnaire	Indicator	Item
Gaslighting (VGQ)	Disagreement	4
	Loss of self-trust	6
	Stage of victimazation	4
Sum		**14**

3.7. Parenting Style Instrument (Parental Authority Questionnaire)

The PAQ questionnaire aims to survey the parenting style of secondary school students. This section consists of 30 items that were selected according to the suitability of the study by adapting items from the Parental Authority Questionnaire instrument by John R. Buri (1991). It is assessed using the five-point Likert Scale. The PAQ questionnaire describes the parenting style which is divided into three indicators, namely permissive, authoritarian and authoritative. The results of several studies have supported the Parenting Authority Questionnaire as a good and valid measure of the Baumrind parenting authority prototype, and they have suggested that the questionnaire has great potential as a valuable tool in permissive, authoritarian and authoritative parenting correlative

investigations. All items that have been adapted are translated into Malay. PAQ has been used in various studies to study the relationship between parenting style and various child development outcomes, including academic achievement, social behavior, and mental health (Buri, 1991).

PAQ was developed based on Baumrind's (1966) theory of parenting style which has been widely accepted in the field of developmental psychology. Thus, it is certain that this instrument can accurately and comprehensively measure the construction of parenting styles. PAQ has also been widely used in various studies and has been proven to have high reliability and validity (Buri, 1991). This gives confidence that the results of studies using PAQ are valid and reliable. PAQ is used to measure the three main dimensions of parenting styles, namely authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. These three dimensions are relevant to this study because different parenting styles are expected to have different influences on adolescent gaslighting experiences and mental health.

Table 5: Parenting Style Instrument (PAQ)

Questionnaire	Indicator	Item
Gaya Kibobapan (Pak)	Permissive	10
	Authoritarian	10
	Authoritative	10
Sum		**30**

3.8. Validity and Reliability

The translation process of the study instrument involving three questionnaires has gone through a *back-to-back translation procedure* with the help of bilingual experts in the fields of English and Malay. This step is taken to ensure the validity and accuracy of the meaning of each item in the translated questionnaire. The experts also assessed the suitability of the questionnaire items with the construct to be measured and provided suggestions for content improvement. In addition, a pilot study was conducted prior to the distribution of the questionnaire to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument as well as to achieve the objectives of the study.

3.9. Pilot Studies

Before the pilot study is conducted, several procedures need to be followed by the researcher. In this case, the researcher chooses to use an instrument that has already been developed and used by other researchers. Two experts were selected to check the validity of the face through language review by language experts and the validity of the content through external criticism techniques. After review and evaluation of the instrument, the expert confirms that the instrument has met the requirements to carry out the field study with the reviewer taking into account the recommendations and views expressed by the expert.

Through a pilot study, the reliability of the instrument in the Alpha Cronbach value for each domain or variable above 0.90 showed high and acceptable reliability (Cohen et al. 2018). In the context of this study, all domain values are in the range of 0.928 to 0.963. The total Alpha Cronbach value for the entire domain recorded a reading of 0.966 which is at a very good level.

This indicates that the Alpha Cronbach value for all domains is above 0.8, which is beyond the minimum value. In this regard, this questionnaire instrument is suitable to be practiced in real studies. Table 6 shows the domain details and values of the Alpha Cronbach study instrument.

Table 6: Alpha Cronbach Values

Inquiry/Domain Questions	Alpha Cronbach Grades
Mental Health	0.944
Gaslighting	0.928
Parenting Style	0.963
Sum	0.966

3.10. Data Analysis Methods

The study involved the analysis of quantitative data. Initially, the data collected from the questionnaire survey is exported from Google Form into an Excel document. The data was then analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 software. This study uses descriptive analysis to summarize and present the demographic data of the respondents. Researchers also analyze, interpret and make generalizations related to the population based on the number of samples that have been determined. In this study, the Likert scale was used to measure gaslighting levels, parenting styles, and mental health levels.

4. STUDY FINDINGS

4.1. Respondent Demographic Data

Table 7 shows the total frequency and percentage of the respondents' demographic information. The frequency table shows that the majority of students are girls, which is 175 students (64.1%). In terms of race, the majority of students are Malays with a total of 154 students (56.4%). The number of Chinese students of 70 (25.6%) and Indian students of 28 (10.3%) was smaller than that of Malay students. The number of students of other races was the smallest at only 21 (7.7%). The demographic details of the students show that the majority of students are female and Malay. The number of Chinese and Indian students is smaller than that of Malay students, while the number of other students is the smallest.

More female respondents than boys may be influenced by certain factors such as school selection bias or stream. Malays are the majority race in the demographic of students in line with the composition of the Malaysian population in general. However, the presence of Chinese and Indian students shows the diversity of races that exist in the school. Based on the available information, the composition of students in the schools involved is dominated by Malay female students. This large difference in the number of male and female respondents may have important implications for data analysis and interpretation of study results, especially when examining differences in experiences and perspectives between the sexes in the context of gaslighting, parenting styles, and mental health. It is important to consider these gender differences when analysing the data and drawing conclusions about the relationship between the variables in this study.

Table 7: Gender and Race Frequency Table

Types of Demographics	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Gender			
Men	98	35.9	35.9
Woman	175	64.1	100
Ethnic			
Melayu	154	56.4	56.4
China	70	25.6	82
India	28	10.3	92.3
Others	21	7.7	100
Sum	**273**	**100**	

4.2. Levels of Mental Health

Table 8 presents the mental health data of secondary school students, which covers three main domains namely stress, anxiety, and depression. The data was analyzed on a scale from "normal" to "very severe".

The majority of students totaling 175 (64.1%) were reported to be at a "normal" stress level. This shows that the majority of students are able to cope with daily challenges without experiencing significant stress. The "light" stress level recorded 21 students (7.7%). However, there are also some students who experience higher levels of stress. A total of 49 students (17.9%) were categorised as experiencing "moderate" stress, while 14 (5.1%) were in the "severe" and "very severe" categories respectively.

Compared to stress, the number of students who were in the "normal" level for anxiety was lower at 84 (30.8%). The "light" stage also recorded a total of 28 students only (10.3%). There was an increase in the percentage of students experiencing higher levels of anxiety, with 28.2% in the "moderate" category with 77 students and 15.4% in the "severe" and "very severe" categories respectively with 42 students in each category.

Almost half of the students, 133 students (48.7%), were in the "normal" level for depression. However, there were also a large number of students who experienced higher levels of depression, with a total of 63 students (23.1%) in the "moderate" category and 7.7% with a total of 21 students in each of the "severe" and "very severe" categories.

Table 8: Mental Health Level Frequency Table

Phase	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Stress			
Normal	175	64.1	64.1
Light	21	7.7	71.8

Moderate	49	17.9	89.7
Severe	14	5.1	94.9
Very severe	14	5.1	100.0
Anxiety			
Normal	84	30.8	30.8
Light	28	10.3	41.0
Moderate	77	28.2	69.2
Severe	42	15.4	84.6
Very severe	42	15.4	100.0
Depression			
Normal	133	48.7	48.7
Light	35	12.8	61.5
Moderate	63	23.1	84.6
Severe	21	7.7	92.3
Very severe	21	7.7	100.0
Sum	**273**	**100**	

Descriptive data showed levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among high school students. Although the average score showed low to moderate levels, there was significant individual variation, indicating that some pupils experienced more severe symptoms. The data also showed clear differences in mental health levels between male and female pupils.

The average score for male students, 0.67 indicates a low stress level. However, a standard deviation of 0.42 indicates a large variation, suggesting that some male students may experience higher stress than other male students overall. Meanwhile, the average score of 1.19 for female students shows a slightly higher stress level compared to male students, but still in the low category. A standard deviation of 0.70 indicates greater variation compared to male students, indicating that some female students experience higher stress.

An average score of 0.59 for male students indicates a low level of anxiety. A standard deviation of 0.47 indicates a considerable variation, suggesting some male students may experience higher anxiety compared to others. The average score of 1.03 for female students shows a higher level of anxiety than for male, but still in the low category. A standard deviation of 0.67 indicates almost the same variation as males, indicating that some females experience higher anxiety.

An average score of 0.52 for male students indicates a low level of depression. A standard deviation of 0.45 indicates a fairly large variation, indicating that some male students may have higher depression than other male overall. An average score of 1.01 for female students indicates a higher level of depression than male students, but still in the low category. The standard deviation of 0.83 showed the greatest variation between the three domains, indicating that some female students experienced higher depression compared to male.

Overall, females showed higher average scores in all three domains than males. This suggests that they tend to experience symptoms related to all three domains at a higher level than male. These

differences may be due to a variety of factors, including biological, social, and environmental differences. Further research is needed to fully understand the factors that contribute to these differences. While average scores indicate low to moderate levels, large individual variation indicates that there are a number of pupils who may need specific attention and intervention. It is important to identify these pupils and provide appropriate support to prevent more serious mental health problems. This data only provides a general picture of the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among secondary school students. More comprehensive assessments are needed to diagnose and treat mental health problems individually.

Table 9: Mental Health Levels by Gender

Domain	Gender	Min	Standard Deviation	Level
Pressure	Men	.6735	.42463	Low
	Woman	1.1943	.69971	Low
Concerns	Men	.5918	.47167	Low
	Woman	1.0286	.66752	Low
Depression	Men	.5204	.45039	Low
	Woman	1.0114	.82984	Low
Sum				

4.3. Gaslighting Among Secondary School Students

Table 9 presents data on gaslighting experiences among secondary school students, which includes three subscales, namely disagreement, loss of self-trust, and stage of victimization. The data was analyzed according to the severity level, from "low" to "high".

The majority of students, a total of 168 students (61.5%), reported experiencing a "moderately high" level of disagreement. This suggests that the vast majority of pupils often doubt their own judgments and perceptions, perhaps due to manipulation or contrary information received. Only 21 students (7.7%) were in the "low" level, while 70 students (25.6%) were in the "moderately low" level. On the other hand, 14 students (5.1%) experienced a "high" level of disagreement, indicating that they frequently questioned the reality and the truth they knew.

Almost half of the students, 133 (48.7%), loss of self-trust at a "high" level. This indicates that a large number of students have low self-confidence and often doubt their own abilities, most likely as a result of the gaslighting experience. Only 7 students (2.6%) were at the "low" level, while 42 students (15.4%) were at the "moderately low" level and 91 students (33.3%) were at the "moderately high" level.

Almost half of the students, a total of 133 students (48.7%), also experienced "moderately high" level of victimization. This indicates that a large number of students have experienced some form of emotional or psychological manipulation. A total of 56 students (20.5%) were in the "low" level of victimization, while 70 students (25.6%) were in the "moderately low" level. On the other hand, a total of 14 students (5.1%) experienced "high" levels of abuse, indicating that they were frequently targeted by manipulation that could negatively impact their well-being.

Table 9: Gaslighting Levels of Secondary School Students

Phase	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Disagreement			
Low	21	7.7	7.7
Medium low	70	25.6	33.3
Medium high	168	61.5	94.9
High	14	5.1	100.0
Loss of self-trust			
Low	7	2.6	2.6
Medium low	42	15.4	17.9
Medium high	91	33.3	51.3
High	133	48.7	100.0
Stage of victimization			
Low	56	20.5	20.5
Medium low	70	25.6	46.2
Medium high	133	48.7	94.9
High	14	5.1	100.0

(Level: Low = 1.00 - 2.00, Medium low = 2.01 - 3.00, Medium high = 3.01 - 4.00, High = 4.01 - 5.00)

4.4. Parenting Style Among Secondary School Students

Table 10 displays data on parenting styles practiced by parents of secondary school students, analysed by ethnicity i.e. Malay, Chinese, Indian, etc. The three main parenting styles rated are permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative.

Data analysis showed the parenting style tendencies practiced by parents of secondary school students in this study. Overall, the mean value for each parenting style was above 2.7, indicating a more inclined tendency towards the permissive and authoritative categories than authoritarian. The highest mean value was recorded for the authoritative style, both for the mother (M = 3.29) and the father (M = 3.18). Overall, it was found that authoritative parenting styles are the most dominant practiced by parents of all races. This is shown by the highest mean value for authoritative styles, both for fathers and mothers, across all races. The authoritative style is characterized by a combination of high demands and responsiveness to the needs of the child. Authoritative parents set clear expectations, provide support and encouragement, and allow children to express their opinions.

Although authoritative styles predominate, there are some differences as well as differences between races. Indian fathers showed the highest tendency towards authoritative style (M = 3.68), followed by Malay fathers (M = 3.29). Indian mothers also showed the highest inclination towards authoritative styles (M = 3.85), followed by Malay mothers (M = 3.35). Chinese fathers, on the other hand, showed a lower tendency towards authoritative style (M = 3.01) compared to other

races. Chinese mothers also showed a lower tendency towards authoritative styles (M = 3.05) compared to other races. Fathers and mothers of other races show considerable differences in the practice of their parenting styles.

Table 10: Parenting Style Among Secondary School Students

Parenting Style	Frequencies	Min	Standard Deviation
Father's Permissive			
Melayu	154	2.6636	.72476
China	70	2.9600	.99688
India	28	2.8000	.40825
Others	21	2.8667	.97125
Permissive Mother			
Melayu	154	2.8182	.76198
China	70	2.8000	.84063
India	28	2.9500	.17321
Others	21	2.9333	.76376
Authoritarian Bapa			
Melayu	154	3.4773	.72960
China	70	2.5000	1.09646
India	28	3.1250	.45000
Others	21	2.7333	1.17189
Authoritarian Ibu			
Melayu	154	3.6364	.84433
China	70	2.4400	.95242
India	28	3.1750	.74554
Others	21	3.2000	.55678
Father's Authoritative			
Melayu	154	3.2864	.69577
China	70	3.0100	.98596
India	28	3.6750	.56199
Others	21	2.2667	1.13725
Authoritative Ibu			
Melayu	154	3.3455	.69606
China	70	3.0500	.98121
India	28	3.8500	.61914
Others	21	2.9667	.28868

N = 273

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the majority of respondents are female students (64.1%) and Malays (56.4%), reflecting the general demographic composition in Malaysia. Although there is racial diversity with the presence of Chinese and Indian students, the dominance of female and

Malay students has important implications in the data analysis and interpretation of the study results. Previous studies have shown that there is a bias in the selection of certain schools or streams based on gender (Zulkifli & Mustapha, 2013). This may explain why there were more female students in this sample of studies. Malaysian demographic studies show that Malays are the majority race (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Therefore, it is appropriate that the majority of respondents in this study are also Malays.

Although the majority of respondents for this study were female, several other studies reported a more balanced gender representation or even more male respondents for example, a study on adolescent mental health by Liu et al., 2020. These differences may be due to differences in study context, geographic location, or sampling methods. Significant gender differences in the sample of these studies should be considered when analysing data and interpreting the results, particularly when examining differences in experiences and perspectives between the sexes in the context of gaslighting, parenting styles, and mental health. The findings of this study may be more relevant and can be generalized to the Malay female student population compared to the male student population or students from other races.

5.1. Levels of Mental Health of High School Students

The findings showed that the majority of secondary school students in the study were in good mental health in general. While the majority of students report normal levels of mental health, there are a significant number who experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. This suggests that mental health issues are a concern that needs to be addressed seriously among adolescents. The findings of this study are in line with previous studies that have shown an increase in mental health problems among adolescents, including stress, anxiety, and depression (Liu et al., 2019). These studies also linked mental health problems to a variety of factors, including academic stress, social relationships, and parenting styles.

Significant gender differences were also observed, with female pupils tending to report higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than male pupils. A study by Liu et al. (2019) on psychological stress and mental health of undergraduate students, found that female students were more likely to experience stress and depressive symptoms than male students. This is in line with the findings of this study which showed that women had higher average scores in all three domains of mental health.

A study by Hassan et al. (2018) found that the level of depression among secondary school students in Malaysia is low. These findings are not in line with this study, which showed a relatively high percentage of 15.4% of 42 pupils who experienced "severe" and "very severe" levels of depression, especially in girls. These differences may be due to differences in samples, measuring instruments, or other factors that affect the mental health of pupils. However, these findings are in line with previous studies that reported an increase in mental health problems among Malaysian adolescents (Adnan et al., 2014; Sivasanthni, 2021). The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2023 also confirms this trend, with the highest rate of mental health problems recorded among 16-19 year olds.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of paying serious attention to mental health issues among secondary school students. While the majority of students are in the "normal" range, there are a large number who experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. This demonstrates the need for more comprehensive intervention and support programmes in schools to help students better manage their mental health.

The study also suggests that gaslighting and parenting styles may play a role in influencing students' mental health. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness of these issues among parents, teachers, and society as a whole. These high school student mental health data provide an alarming picture of the psychological well-being of adolescents. While there is diversity in mental health levels, it is important to take proactive steps to address these issues and ensure that all students receive the support they need to thrive in a healthy and balanced manner. Furthermore, a study by Balan & Alfred (2013) linking mental health to academic performance, school attendance, and risk of risky behaviors, reinforces the importance of understanding and addressing mental health issues among high school students.

Overall, there are past studies that support the findings of this study, which is that women tend to experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than men. However, it is worth noting that there are also studies that show inconsistent or conflicting results. This suggests that the relationship between gender and mental health is complex and influenced by a variety of factors, including biological, social, and environmental factors. Further research is needed to identify the factors contributing to this variation and to develop appropriate interventions to help students with mental health problems.

5.2. Gaslighting Levels of High School Students

Studies have found that high school students experience gaslighting at alarming levels. Overall, the data from the study results show that gaslighting is an issue that needs serious attention among secondary school students. High levels of disagreement, loss of self-trust, and stage of victimization indicate that many pupils may be susceptible to manipulation tactics that can have negative consequences for their mental and emotional well-being.

This gaslighting data reveals an alarming reality about the experience of secondary school students. While there is variation in the severity of the gaslighting experience, it is important to take proactive steps to address this issue and ensure that all students receive the support they need to thrive in a healthy and balanced manner. The data also shows that gaslighting is a common issue among secondary school students. Many pupils report experiencing disagreements, loss of self-trust, and abuse, which are common effects of gaslighting. This gaslighting experience has the potential to have a negative impact on students' mental health, especially in increasing the risk of stress, anxiety, and depression.

The findings of this study are in line with previous studies that have shown that gaslighting can lead to a range of negative effects, including self-doubt, confusion, and feelings of helplessness (Stern, 2018; Evans, 2020). These studies also highlight that gaslighting can occur in a variety of contexts, including in families and close relationships. Määttä and Uusiautti (2021), on the other

hand, through their study of parental psychological control, found that this kind of manipulation can improve social process problems in adolescents, such as depression and anxiety. This further reinforces the link between gaslighting and poor mental health.

While there are many studies that show the negative effects of gaslighting, there are also studies that focus on coping and recovery strategies from gaslighting experiences (Sweet, 2019). These studies highlight that individuals who have experienced gaslighting can develop resilience and the ability to recognize and deal with manipulation in the future.

The findings of this study show that gaslighting is an issue that needs serious attention among secondary school students. High levels of disagreement, loss of self-trust, and high stae of victimization indicate that many pupils may be susceptible to manipulation tactics that can have negative consequences for their mental and emotional well-being. It is important to raise awareness about gaslighting among parents, teachers, and society as a whole. Intervention and support programmes need to be provided to help students who are victims of gaslighting to regain their self-confidence and build healthy relationships.

5.3. Parenting Style Among Secondary School Students

The findings showed that authoritative parenting styles were the most dominant practiced in the sample of this study. This style is characterized by a combination of high demands and responsibility for the needs of the child. Authoritative parents set clear expectations, provide support and encouragement, and allow children to express their opinions.

These findings are in line with previous studies showing that authoritative parenting styles are generally associated with positive outcomes in children, including better academic achievement, high self-esteem, and fewer behavioral problems (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 2001). In the context of this study, authoritative parenting styles may play a protective role against the negative effects of gaslighting. Authoritative parents tend to foster open communication and promote children's autonomy, which can help children develop self-confidence and the ability to think critically. This can reduce their risk of becoming victims of gaslighting manipulation. Although authoritative styles predominate, the mean values of permissive and authoritarian styles are also quite high. This suggests that there was diversity in parenting style practices in the study sample. In addition, the relatively high standard deviation of each parenting style shows that there are large differences among parents.

Overall, the findings of this study show that authoritative parenting styles are the most commonly practiced by parents in the study sample. While this style is generally associated with positive outcomes, it's important to recognize that it can also have potential drawbacks, especially in the context of gaslighting. Diversity and variation in parenting style practices should also be taken into account in understanding the relationship between parenting styles, gaslighting, and children mental health. The tendency of Asian parents, including in Malaysia, to adopt an authoritative parenting style has been documented in various studies (Chao, 1994; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Authoritative parenting styles are associated with a variety of positive outcomes in children, including better academic achievement, high self-esteem, and fewer behavioral problems

(Baumrind, 1991). While authoritative styles are generally seen as positive, there are also studies that show that authoritative parents can inadvertently use gaslighting tactics (Bracey, 2021). The high setting of expectations and the emphasis on compliance in some cases, can lead to situations where parents do not recognize or minimize the child's feelings and experiences, which are the main characteristics of gaslighting.

Past studies have also shown that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles can increase the risk of mental health problems in adolescents (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). In the context of this study, the existence of these parenting styles in the study sample may explain some of the variation in the level of mental health of students. Another study showed that authoritarian parenting styles, which were also relatively high among Malay fathers and mothers in this study, could increase the risk of mental health problems in adolescents (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

A study by Ibrahim et al. (2019) showed a relationship between negative parenting styles (such as authoritarian or permissive) and an increased risk of mental health problems in adolescents. Although this study did not directly measure parenting styles, findings on high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in some students, especially female, may be related to experiences of gaslighting, which can be one form of negative parenting style.

The authoritative parenting style was found to be the most dominant style practiced by parents in the study sample. Although this style is generally associated with positive outcomes, this study also shows that it can interact with gaslighting and affect students' mental health. There are also variations in parenting style practices by race, which may reflect cultural differences and social norms. These findings provide insight into the diversity of parenting style practices in Malaysia's pluralistic society. While authoritative styles predominate, it's important to recognize that each parenting style has its own advantages and disadvantages. In the context of this study, it is important to further examine how the interaction between parenting styles, specifically authoritative, and gaslighting experiences can affect the mental health of secondary school students.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, the mental health level of students was reported to be at a normal level, however, there were a large number who experienced higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Gaslighting among secondary school students has been detected to be at an alarming level and needs to be paid attention to by the relevant authorities. Authoritative parenting style is described as the most dominant parenting style practice among parents of secondary school students. However, the practice of permissive and authoritarian parenting styles is also widely practiced by parents of students. This study provides a comprehensive picture of mental health, gaslighting experiences, and parenting styles among high school students. The data collected revealed some important findings that deserve attention. This study has important implications for raising awareness about the effects of gaslighting and parenting styles on students' mental health. It helps identify the level of gaslighting, parenting style as well as the level of mental health of secondary school students. Early signs of a problem are easier to detect and the parties involved can provide better support for the affected students. The findings of this study also help to promote open communication

between parents and children, as well as equip parents and educators with the knowledge to prevent and address these problems. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of counselling services in schools and prevention programs to raise awareness about mental health, reduce stigma, and encourage community support for those with mental health problems. This study can also serve as a basis for the development of a more comprehensive action plan and public awareness campaign to address mental health problems among secondary school students comprehensively. Studies on gaslighting, parenting styles, and mental health among secondary school students have some limitations, including limited use of quantitative methods, samples that may not be representative, questionnaires that may not be sufficiently reliable or valid, difficulty in separating the effects of gaslighting and parenting styles from other factors, the likelihood that students may not report information accurately, and difficulty generalizing findings to other contexts. Further studies with stronger methodologies and more representative samples are needed to better understand the complex relationship between gaslighting, parenting styles, and mental health. Since this study is descriptive and focuses on the level aspect, only discussing the relationship between gender and race, the proposal for further research should focus on the relationship between gaslighting, parenting style and mental health of secondary school students specifically and more deeply. The conduct of qualitative studies to gain a deeper understanding of individual experiences with gaslighting, parenting styles, and mental health is also well placed for consideration. We need to use a larger and more representative sample of studies to improve the reliability and validity of our findings. Researchers may also consider other factors that can contribute to a student's mental health, such as academic stress, family problems, and personal problems. Finally, researchers also need to compare the findings of studies in different contexts, such as different countries or cultures.

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