

Brief Report

Relationship between Test Anxiety and Parenting Style

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between test anxiety and parenting style. **Method:** Democratic attitude of parents, acceptance of parents by the child, parental attitude regarding academics, parental expectations and gender stereotyped perceptions of parents regarding academics were evaluated in the domain of parenting style in a convenience sample of 207 students and 200 mothers. **Results:** A statistically significant negative correlation was observed between test anxiety and democratic attitude of parents and acceptance of parents by the child. **Conclusion:** Inculcating a democratic style of parenting and greater acceptance of parents among children may prevent or ameliorate test anxiety.

Keywords: *Test anxiety; Parental attitude; Parental expectations; Gender stereotype.*

INTRODUCTION

About 20 to 50% of school aged children experience test anxiety¹. Anxiety among students and their parents has been reported to be on the rise in India, especially among those facing Board (Certification) examinations². Parenting style has a major influence on the development of the child. Hill theorized that children of very critical parents, with unrealistically high expectations, might develop anxiety during the preschool years³. Krohne proposed a two-process model of parental influence on children's test anxiety that predicts that children of restrictive or inconsistent parents develop more test anxiety than do those with supportive parents⁴. The present study explores the relationship between test anxiety and parenting style.

METHOD

The sample comprised of 207 students (109 male and 98 female) from the 11th standard (science stream) from three educational institutions in Pune and 200 mothers. The age of the students ranged between 15 to 17 years and the average marks obtained by them in the 10th standard was 74%. The students would face the higher secondary school certificate board examination after one year. After a written informed consent was obtained from the parents, the students were contacted and explained the purpose and the procedure of the study and their assent was taken.

The students were administered the Test Attitude Inventory (TAI)⁵, Test of Democratic Attitude of the Parents (TDAP)⁶, and Test of Acceptance of the Parent by the Child (TAPC)⁶. TAI is a 20-item scale with subscales of worry and emotionality. The Cronbach's alpha and the test-retest reliability of the inventory have been reported to be 0.92 and 0.80, respectively. High correlation (above 0.8) has been reported with the Test Anxiety Scale⁵. The TDAP is a 20-item

scale designed to assess the authoritarian-democratic dimension of parenting style as perceived by the child, with high scores indicating democratic style of parenting. The TAPC has 17 items which measure acceptance of parents by the child. Both TDAP and TAPC yield separate scores for the child's perception of fathers and mothers. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the TDAP and TAPC were reported to be 0.74 and 0.73, respectively⁶.

Mothers were administered the Parental Attitude regarding Academics Scale (PAA) and the Parental Expectations and Gender Stereotyped Perceptions in the Area of Academics Scale (PEGSA), both of which were developed specifically for the present study. The PAA consists of 14 items (range of score: 14-70). Its Cronbach's alpha is 0.74. The PEGSA consists of 29 items (range of score: 29-145). High scores indicate high parental expectations regarding their child's academics as well as greater gender stereotyped perceptions of parents. The content validity of this test was found to be satisfactory by a set of experts (teachers and psychologists).

RESULTS

The results of the present study indicated statistically significant negative correlations between test anxiety and democratic attitude of parents and acceptance of parents (Table 1). Statistically significant negative correlations were also observed between the worry and emotionality components of test anxiety and democratic attitudes of mothers as well as fathers. Worry rather than the emotionality component of test anxiety had a statistically significant negative correlation with acceptance of parents. There was no statistically significant correlation between test anxiety and attitudes and expectation of mothers towards their child's academics and gender stereotyped perceptions of mothers regarding academics.

Table -1: Correlation between test anxiety and parenting style (N= 207)

	Test anxiety	Test anxiety: emotionality	Test anxiety: worry
Democratic attitude			
Parents	-0.257**	-0.164**	-0.356**
Mothers	-0.224**	-0.135*	-0.320**
Fathers	-0.253**	-0.167**	-0.347**
Acceptance			
Parents	-0.171**	-0.095	-0.202**
Mothers	-0.174**	-0.098	-0.207**
Fathers	-0.156*	-0.083	-0.186**

** p< 0.01 level; * p< 0.05 level

DISCUSSION

Research indicates that children with parents having democratic parenting style are better adjusted⁷. The present research suggests perception of parental warmth is likely to reduce the threat implied in evaluative experiences. The present study also emphasizes the importance of acceptance of parents by the child. Stagner suggested that acceptance leads to identification which in turn gives the child relief from feelings of helplessness as well as a sense of strength⁸. This may help the child in academic achievement and mitigate test anxiety. Worry rather than emotionality component of test anxiety had a statistically significant negative correlation with acceptance of parents. Rejection of parents may represent a situation of conflict and of insecure attachment. It may lead to perception of evaluative situations as threatening to the self and hence to worries. However, the fact that all correlations were below 0.4 (and were significant because of the large sample size) suggests the need to evaluate other predictors of test anxiety.

Contrary to the result of the present study, researchers have stated that perfectionist attitude of mothers is positively related with anxiety among children^{9,10}. Similarly, unreasonable parental expectations (especially when accompanied by faulty parental behavior pattern) adversely affects the child's psychological wellbeing¹¹. The lack of association between parental attitudes regarding child's academics and test anxiety in the present study could be due to the fact that mothers rather than fathers were evaluated, due to socially desirable responding, or due to the possibility that the sample comprised of more resilient students (science stream, average in secondary school 74%). It is also possible that in India where academic achievement is highly valued, there may be little discrepancy between the standards set by the students and their parents.

The lack of correlation between mothers' gender-stereotyped perceptions in the field of academics and test anxiety could be due to the multi-faceted nature of such perceptions. For example, expectation of high performance in mathematics by boys may also be perceived as an endorsement of capability.

The cross-sectional nature of the study limits conclusions regarding causality; and the non-representativeness of the sample limits its generalizability. However, the results of the present study may help students, parents and child mental health professionals to plan appropriate therapeutic strategies targeted at home environment to help children and adolescents develop their full potential fully.

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