

Examination of Relationship between Anxiety Sensitivity and Parenting Styles in Adolescents

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Abstract

This research investigated the relationships between anxiety sensitivity and perceived parenting styles of adolescents and the predictive role of perceived parenting styles on anxiety sensitivity. The study group was composed by 545 (255 females; 290 males) students studying in different high schools in Mugla. The data were collected using the Anxiety Sensitivity Index-R, and Parental Attitudes Scale. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was employed to search for relationships between anxiety sensitivity and parenting styles; multiple hierarchical regression analysis was also used for explaining anxiety sensitivity. The findings showed that the democratic, protective-demanding, and authoritarian parenting styles were found to be significantly correlated to anxiety sensitivity and democratic, protective-demanding, and authoritarian parenting styles important predictors of anxiety sensitivity.

Key Words

Anxiety Sensitivity, Parenting Styles, Adolescents.

Human beings change and develop continuously throughout their life. One of the periods that these changes occur is the adolescence period. Many emotional problems, difficulties seen in adolescence are closely linked to the quality of the relationship as an infant with the first caregiver (Bowlby, 1969). In adolescence various biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes take place, affecting the parent-child relationship (Lerner et al., 1996). Therefore, it seems necessary to clarify which factors influence parenting styles in this particular period of life (Düzgün, 1995). It is widely assumed that the nature and quality of the interactions between parents and adolescents can contribute to

young people's well-being (Bandura, 1997). Anxiety disorders have been associated with a variety of maladaptive cognitive styles (Andrews et al., 2003). For example, anxiety has been associated with increased attention to potentially threatening stimuli and a tendency to interpret neutral stimuli as threatening; lower perceived controllability of situations (Chorpita & Barlow, 1998; Çifter, 1985; Dağ, 1999; Ertürk, 1994; Geçtan, 2003; Özusta, 1993; Ulutaş, 1999) and increased fear and avoidance of anxiety related symptoms (Kaya, 2001; Reiss, 1991; Reiss & McNally, 1985). These reliable findings have led to some of the most widely accepted theories of anxiety development and maintenance. Anxiety sensitivity is fear of internal anxiety symptoms arising from the belief that the symptoms have harmful physical, psychological, and/or social consequences. Anxiety sensitivity refers to the extent of beliefs that anxiety symptoms or arousal can have harmful consequences (Starcevic & Berle, 2006). There is growing evidence for anxiety sensitivity as a risk factor for anxiety disorders. Anxiety sensitivity is elevated in panic disorder as well as other anxiety disorders (Gorman, Kent, Sullivan, & Coplan,

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2000). It is thought to contribute to the maintenance and severity of anxiety symptoms (Asmundson, 2001). Anxiety sensitivity plays an important role in shaping the risk of developing various types of fears and anxiety disorders (Taylor, 1999).

Given the importance of anxiety sensitivity for understanding these emotional problems, it is important to gain a better understanding of the nature and etiology of anxiety sensitivity (Taylor, 1995). In addition to genetic factors, and specific types of learning experiences, interpersonal factors may also play a role in the development of elevated anxiety sensitivity (Taylor, Jang, Stewart, & Stein, 2008; Taylor, Koch, Woody, & McLean, 1996). Assuming parenting styles play a central role in the development of anxiety disorders, it becomes important to understand how overprotective parenting exacerbates or spurs the development of anxiety symptoms (Adler, 1963; Baldwin, McIntyre, & Hardaway, 2007; Çağdaş & Seçer, 2004; Erkan, 2002; Navaro, 1989; Yavuzer, 2005). The theories of Chorpita and Barlow (1998), and Rapee (2001) provide insight into potential explanations for this relationship. As discussed by Chorpita and Barlow, overprotective and authoritarian parenting may decrease the child's beliefs about their capability to control events, thus leading these children to interpret more events as threatening, therefore leading them to avoid situations. Rapee would posit that parental overprotection would not only exacerbate anxiety risk by the mechanisms described by Chorpita and Barlow, but he would additionally suggest that risk is generally increased by the behaviors exhibited by the child, as these behaviors may elicit parental overprotection.

Further, parents with high levels of anxiety sensitivity may intervene more often, as they observe signs of anxiety in their children, judging these symptoms as harmful. Studies examining the relationship between early parental interactions and later psychopathology provide some evidence that parenting styles characterized by overprotection and low warmth or noncontingent parental responsiveness may be significant influences in the development of psychopathology (anxiety, depression, anxiety sensitivity etc.) (Barlow, 2002; Fromm, 1995; Tahiroğlu, Avcı, & Çekin, 2008). Anxiety sensitivity can be thought of as the fear of anxiety symptoms based on the belief that they will have harmful consequences (Asmundson, Norton, & Veloso, 1999; Erözkan, 2011). Anxiety sensitivity can account for the other behavioral and cognitive characteristics of anxiety (Dayhoff, 2000). Someone

with high anxiety sensitivity is likely to be very attentive for situations producing anxiety symptoms. For that reason, the problem of this research is to reveal the significant relationships between anxiety sensitivity and parenting styles.

Method

Model

This study is a quantitative and relational study aimed at examining the relationships between anxiety sensitivity and parenting styles. The data were collected by Anxiety Sensitivity Index-R, and Parental Attitudes Scale.

Participants

In the study, the data were collected by randomly selected one 1st, one 2nd, one 3rd, and one 4th grade class from each different type of high schools in Mugla. The research was carried out with the data gathered from 255 females (45%) and 290 males (55%) high school students. The students were in 15-18 age range and, average age was 16.71 with a standard deviation of 1.33. 27.4 % of the participants were 1st grade students, 23.3% of them was 2nd grade students, 26.5% of them was 3rd grade students, and 22.8% of them were 4th grade students.

Instruments

In the study, in order to determine the anxiety sensitivity levels of students Anxiety Sensitivity Index-Revised (ASI-R) was used which was developed by Taylor and Cox (1998). The ASI-R is a 36-item self-report questionnaire that assesses fear of anxiety-related sensations. The Turkish version of the ASI-R was adapted by Çakmak (2006) who reported an internal consistency coefficient of .93, and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .83. The parallel form validity of the ASI-R was tested with the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979) and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970); $r=.49$ and $r=.62$. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the scale was calculated .86. In the study, in order to determine the parental attitudes Parental Attitudes Scale (PAS) was used which was developed by Kuzgun and Eldeleklioğlu (2005). The PAS is composed of 40 items and it has three subscales (democratic, protective-demanding, and authoritarian). Answers to the PAS have been ordered in a way as to be graded in according to the 5-choice

Likert-type scale (1=nonrelevant; 2=slightly relevant; 3=partially relevant; 4=very relevant; 5=totally relevant). Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated for each subscale. The internal consistency reliabilities were .89 for democratic, .82 for protective-demanding and .78 for authoritarian parenting styles and test-retest reliability coefficients were respectively .92, .75, and .79 (Kuzgun & Eldeleklioglu, 2005 as cited in Erözkan, 2009). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the democratic subscale .87, protective-demanding subscale .83, and authoritarian subscale was calculated .77.

Procedures

The permit for data collection was obtained from Mugla Provincial Directorate of National Education, and the data were gathered from the randomly selected schools and classes by researcher. The data collection procedure was carried out by providing students with the appropriate environment and sufficient time for answering the questions in groups in the classroom.

Data Analysis

In this study, the analysis of relationships between anxiety sensitivity and parenting styles was performed by Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis and multiple hierarchical regression analysis. The data were investigated from the point of erroneous or missing values, outlier values, and multicollinearity in data analysis. The values considered to be entered erroneously were corrected in the erroneous values analysis. In the missing values analysis, randomly remaining few blank items were assigned values by Expectation-Maximization algorithm (Green & Salkind, 2008; Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). In the outlier analysis, 13 observations, which have Mahalanobis (1936) distance value greater than the $\chi^2_{12;.001} = 32.90$ table value, were excluded from the data set. The low level bivariate correlation values show that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables. It has been seen that Variance Inflation Factor value is less than 5, the tolerance value is greater than .20, the condition index is less than 30, and consequently 545 observations remain in the data set.

Results

According to the results of this research there is a significant relationships between anxiety sensitivity and parenting styles and perceived parenting styles

important predictors of anxiety sensitivity for high school students. Table 1 shows that anxiety sensitivity is positively related to protective-demanding and authoritarian parenting styles, and negatively related to democratic parenting style. Table 2 shows that anxiety sensitivity is significantly explained by the democratic, protective-demanding, and authoritarian parenting styles ($R=.54$, $R^2=.29$, $F=36.902$, $p<.001$). Three parenting styles significantly explained 29.1% of the total variance in anxiety sensitivity. According to results of a *t* test that was intended to determine which parenting styles predict anxiety sensitivity, it was found that democratic style ($t=-4.327$, $p<.001$), protective-demanding style ($t=4.519$, $p<.001$), and authoritarian style ($t=4.841$, $p<.001$) were significant predictors of anxiety sensitivity. The results of the research are thought to give important information about the formation of anxiety sensitivity in adolescence.

Discussion

It has been found that there are significant relationships between anxiety sensitivity and parenting styles. It can be concluded from the research findings that adolescents' perceived negative parenting styles may be a precursor to anxiety sensitivity. There is clear evidence for a relation between perceived parenting styles and children's psychological functioning. For example, Mannuzza et al. (2002) found that perceived parental pressure correlated positively with trait anxiety and with anxiety sensitivity. Conversely, parental warmth was positively associated with active coping and negatively with anxiety (Landis & Stone, 1952). Children raised with authoritarian parenting style don't get what they need either (Eldeleklioglu, 1996; Kuzgun, 1972). They grow up to be extremely self- and other-critical. They are judgmental in the same ways their parents were judgmental of them (Kulaksizoglu, 1998). As adults, they become either very passive or withdrawn, and tremendously insecure, anxious, or they become like the abusive, controlling authoritarian that raised them. Constant parental intervention in situations of child distress or situations of perceived physical danger, may increase the likelihood of the child interpreting the physical symptoms associated with anxiety as harmful, thus, these become feelings and situations to be feared and avoided (Manassis & Bradley, 1994; Ök, 1990; Sargin, 1990). The authoritarian parent is demanding, but unresponsive to the child, tends to use punitive and harsh punishment, physical enforcement, reprimands, and prohibitive inter-

ventions (Kulaksızoğlu, 2003, 2005; Küçük, 1987). The children of authoritarian parents have been described as anxious, angry, aggressive, and having low self-esteem (Baumrind, 1966, 1967, 1971; MacCoby & Martin, 1983). These findings suggest that negative parenting styles may in fact act as a risk factor for anxiety symptoms.

Anxiety sensitivity was originally identified and defined by Reiss and McNally (1985) as the fear of anxiety-related sensations. It is thought that anxiety sensitivity develops early on in a person's life. There is even some evidence that anxiety sensitivity may be partly inherited from parents (Stein, Jang, & Livesley, 1999). However, it is generally thought that anxiety sensitivity largely develops from early experiences in life. For example, a child who sees his or her parents overreact with fear to sickness may begin to believe that certain normal bodily feelings (such as those connected with anxiety) are dangerous and threatening (Watt, Stewart, & Cox, 1998). Scher and Stein (2003) found that anxiety sensitivity mediated a relationship between early parenting experiences and current distress. In fact, anxiety sensitivity was predicted by levels of parent threat, hostility, and rejection. Indeed, parents of anxious children have been described in the literature as anxious, controlling, meddling, overprotective, rejecting, affectionless, demanding, and partial (Horney, 1945). These findings also suggest that negative parenting styles may as a risk factor for anxiety sensitivity.

The relationships with parents are crucial for children because parents prepare their children for life (Dökmen, 1996). Adolescence can be defined as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, and he or she solve the problems easily in this transition phase depends on the positive attitudes of parents. That is, adolescents can easily solve their personal and interpersonal problems by means of establishing positive dialogue with parents (Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995; McGillicuddy, Rychtarik, Morsheimer, & Burke, 2007; Özen, 2001; Yıldırım, 2006). Taken into account by parents, adolescents feel valued and express their feelings and thoughts better, and this process will increase their self-confidence (Erdoğan & Uçukoğlu, 2011). In a healthy manner, the prevention of behavior problems of adolescents and their families is required. In this respect, it should be taught healthy ways of coping with problems in adolescence within the framework of preventive counseling services. And school guidance service should provide such as conflict resolution training, anger control, social

skills training, and effective interpersonal problem-solving skills with school-based programs for adolescents. It is thought that these programs for parents and educators to be useful (Savi & Akboy, 2009; Sezer, 2010). This research is not without limitations. First the sample consisted of adolescents who were recruited from the school setting. In as much as they represent a convenience sample, the generalizability of findings needs to be shown through replication in a more representative sample from the general population and among adolescents in other settings. Second longitudinal studies are needed to examine the role of negative parenting styles and their influence on the development of the anxiety related sensations and the processes that lead to the elevation of anxiety sensitivity. In addition, the attachment framework may help extend understanding the development of anxiety sensitivity into other samples. Taking into account these important limitations, this study adds to the knowledge based on the origins of anxiety sensitivity and its suggested relation to parenting styles, results clearly show that authoritarian and overprotective parenting styles are particularly important factors in anxiety sensitivity.

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