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Effects of Parenting Styles on Anxiety and School Refusal in Children

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Abstract

The current study examined the relationship between different styles of parenting, anxiety and school refusal behavior in children. The study was conducted with a sample of 150 school going children from different public and private schools and 150 of their mothers. The age range of children was 5-13 years with a mean of 6.38 years ($SD=2.04$). The parenting style of mothers was determined using Parenting Style Scale. Anxiety in children was determined using Spence Children's Anxiety Scale and school refusal behavior was determined using School Refusal Assessment Scale-R. Cross-sectional research design was used for this research and data was collected from children in groups, while mothers were approached individually. The data was then analyzed using correlation, regression and ANOVA. The study yielded a significant relationship of controlling and avoidant parenting styles with anxiety in children. A significant negative relationship was also found of supportive and aggressive parenting styles with anxiety in children. A significant positive relationship was found of avoidant and aggressive parenting styles with function 1 of school refusal. Moreover, a significant negative relationship of supportive and compassionate parenting styles with function 1 and 2 of school refusal was also found. Gender differences were found for anxiety. This research has future implications for parents, therapists and school psychologists.

Keywords: child anxiety, parenting style, school refusal

Introduction

Parenting styles are best described as strategies that parents may apply for raising their children. They also involve the techniques used by parents to discipline their children, as well as the degree of involvement of parents in their children's life. The development of children is greatly impacted by strategies of parenting (Arendell, 1997). The way parents choose to raise their children plays a great role in shaping their personality. Thus, exploring exactly how much influence it may have on children is the basic goal of this research. In the early stages of life, the role of parental attitude towards children is essential; the child may be subject to feelings that encourage a sense of love and safety or those that advance anxiety and mistrust

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(Turner & Helms, [1995](#)). Consequently, the exploration of the most appropriate parenting style may provide essential information for understanding the long term influence of parenting styles. Baumrind ([1971](#)) argued that parents should neither be too harsh nor too lenient when setting limits for their children. Instead, they should focus on creating rules for them and provide encouragement and love throughout their development (Santrock, [2013](#)). Parenting styles acknowledged by Baumrind ([1971](#)) included authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglectful styles. Furthermore, evidence from previous studies suggests that the authoritarian parenting style may be linked to anxiety, as construed by a study that explored parental control, warmth, socialization and its impact on child anxiety. This research found that there is in fact a positive association of parental control and overprotection with children's social anxiety (Rork & Morris, [2009](#)).

Anxiety disorders have become quite prevalent globally and they were found to be the sixth leading cause of disability in terms of the 'years lived with disabilities' (YLDs) in high, low and middle income countries. Moreover, 390 disability adjusted life years per 100,000 people were found to be accounted by anxiety disorders in 2010 (Baxter, Vos, Scott, Ferrari & Whiteford, [2014](#)). These statistics provide compelling evidence to conduct the current study and to identify the risk factors or any possible relationship that anxiety may have with parenting styles. Different forms of anxiety that may emerge in children and were explored in the current study are as follows: separation anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, panic disorder and agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder and social phobia. A study which explored general anxiety in children showed a positive association between child anxiety and the paternal or authoritarian parenting style (BR & Ramen, [2019](#)). Furthermore, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) was also found to be linked with parenting styles. Particularly, a study found that neglectful, permissive and authoritarian parenting styles are more likely to be linked with the development of OCD in childhood as well as its later development in adulthood (Kamali, Looyeh & Rashid, [2014](#)). Moreover, anxious and obsessive compulsive thoughts were monitored in adolescents and a negative relationship was found between the authoritative parenting style and anxiety ridden thoughts (Khanjani, Anamag & Gholamzadeh, [2012](#)). The third variable this research focused on was school refusal, which is essentially a child's refusal to attend school. Kearney and Silverman developed a functional model of school refusal. This model provided a functional classification of factors which caused a child to refuse to go to school. These functions were based on positive and negative reinforcement; the former became the cause for a child to refuse to attend school in pursuit of a reward outside the school and the latter entailed avoiding negative affectivity provoking stimuli at

school (Kearney, [1993](#)). The functional model explains school refusal in terms of four functions. These include avoidance of anxiety provoking situations at school (Function 1), avoidance of aversive social situations at school (Function 2), attention seeking (Function 3), and attaining tangible rewards (Function 4). Research suggests that school adjustment in an adaptive manner is associated with parental autonomy, while a maladaptive adjustment to school is associated with psychological parental control in adolescents (Xiang, Liu & Bai, [2017](#)).

Previous research proved the existence of a relationship between parenting styles and anxiety. A study conducted by Benoit ([2009](#)) catering African American children further affirmed that African American parents are more controlling than their white counterparts and thus African American children have higher levels of anxiety.

Furthermore, Baxter et al. ([2014](#)) examined the globally rising rate of anxiety. It was found that there were 200 million cases of anxiety diagnosed in 1990 and that number rose to 272 million in the year 2010. Anxiety disorder further accounted for 390 YLDs per 100,000 people and was found to be the sixth leading cause of disability. Disability-Adjustment Life Year (DALYs) increased by 36% between the years 1990 and 2010.

Mofrad, Abdullah and Sammah ([2009](#)) did an interesting research on school children in their first grade who depicted symptoms of separation anxiety disorder. In their study, parental overprotection was found to be a significant predictor of separation anxiety in children. Similarly, another study by Edwards and Rapee ([2007](#)) further suggested that a mother's over protective behavior acts as a protective shield for her children, thus causing them to become more dependent on her. Furthermore, a Chinese study by Xu, Ni, Ran and Zhang ([2017](#)) on migrant families indicated that social anxiety in adolescents can be increased by a mother's overprotective behavior but can also be decreased by a father's elevated emotional warmth. Moreover, Dumas, La Franiere, and Serketich ([1995](#)) also suggested that girls with high levels of anxiety have mothers who wanted to be ever present for their daughters to guide them even in simple daily tasks.

Moreover, a dissertation done by Strunk ([2016](#)) explored the existence of a significant relationship between the various subtypes of OCD and different parenting styles as suggested by Baumrind, Larzelere and Owens ([2010](#)). The study did not yield any significant difference or relationship among the various subtypes of OCD and different parenting styles. Although, a link between OCD and parenting styles was established by previous researches (Timpano, Keough, Mahaffey, Schmidt & Abramowitz, [2010](#))

Timpano et al. (2010) conducted a research on the relationship between obsessive compulsive symptoms and parenting styles and found that authoritarian parenting was correlated with elevated levels of obsessive compulsive symptoms. It was also found that authoritarian parenting style had no relation with obsessive-compulsive symptoms.

Another study carried out by Aycicegi, Harris, and Dinn (2011) also supports these findings. The research was conducted with a sample of students. It centered on obsessive compulsive symptoms and traits and how they may correlate with parental acceptance, psychological control and firmness. The researchers found that the controlling parenting style wasn't a unique predictor of obsessive compulsive symptoms or traits. However, psychological control exercised by parents did turn out to be a predictor of both obsessive compulsive symptoms and traits.

Rosli (2014) conducted a research on the parenting style of the parents of American Muslim children and how these styles can impact the children's emotional or behavioral problems. They also explored the role religion plays in this regard along with parenting styles. However, their study did not yield any statistically significant results in terms of any difference among parenting styles in causing emotional or behavioral problems in children.

A longitudinal study conducted by Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, and Dornbusch (1994) found that adolescents raised in authoritative families had an advantage over their counterparts in terms of psychosocial competence, academic competence, internalized distress, and problem behaviors. Moreover, another study carried out in Malaysia by Talib, Mohamad and Mamat (2011) also showed that a positive effect on children's behavior and school achievement was attributed to authoritative parenting, while a negative effect was related to authoritarian and permissive parenting.

Lungarini (2015) conducted a study on a sample of 4898 families living in the United States of America. The final sample comprised 78 mothers and 1950 fathers. The study focused on how different parenting styles caused anxiety in children. The results indicated that a father's responsiveness was negatively correlated with a child's anxiety. Hence, the more responsive the father was, the lesser the level of anxiety was shown by the child.

The UNESCO report of Pakistan indicated that the literacy rate of Pakistan as of 2010 was only 56%. Moreover, 67% of literate people were males and only a mere 38% were females (Nagata, 2013). There are a number of factors that can account for the low literacy rate. However, due to the lack of relevant research,

there can be no concrete figure given about how many people choose to remain illiterate due to the fear of attending school. Nonetheless, keeping in view the previous literature we can assume that this low literacy rate can also be attributed to school refusal. Thus, more comprehensive research into the factors that put children at risk for refusing school were explored in this research.

Egger, Costello, and Angold (2003) conducted a study on 9-16 year old students and their parents to elaborate psychological dysfunctions associated with school refusal and absenteeism. They found that anxious school refusal as well as truancy could be linked to psychological distress along with other factors corresponding to familial and school environment.

Kearney and Albano (2004) suggested that the most common disorders that arise in children in addition to school refusal are specific phobias, separation anxiety, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorder, major depressive disorder, and dysthymia.

Timberlake (1984) carried out a study which indicated that 52.7% of the parents of school refusers were having marital problems. This shows a greater than average influence of marital issues on school refusal. Furthermore, Torma and Halsti (1975) conducted a study on family environment with anxious youth and found that overindulgence and inhibiting overprotectiveness displayed by the family had a negative effect on the child.

Recent research conducted by Schafer (2011) indicated a significant relationship between low levels of family cohesion and high conflicts with Function 1 of school refusal. Moreover, a significant relationship between Function 3 of school refusal and low independence was found in English speaking families only (not in Spanish speaking families). Finally, Function 4 indicated a significant positive relationship with conflict subscales and a significant negative relationship was found with cohesion subscales.

The rising rate of anxiety in Pakistan along with a low literacy rate may suggest a link between the two, as it is likely that rising anxiety may interfere with a positive experience at school. Thus, investigating these aspects of anxiety and school refusal is important. The degree of parental influence exerted in our culture and the ever expanding negative attitude of children towards school were casted as the basic foundations to carry out this study. Pakistan is a country teeming with resilient and resourceful people and yet there are many mental disorders and simple shortcomings that go unnoticed. If awareness is created, a few counseling sessions might help tremendously with children that are too anxious or afraid of going to

school. The prevailing notion in the Pakistani culture completely dismisses the role of psychological factors in a child's performance and it has caused a lot of damage. A child's refusal to go to school is simply waved off by parents as truancy or disrespect and thus parents are prone to use harsh disciplinary tactics. This research provides empirical evidence to undermine the prevailing notions in the society, so that the real causes of such behavior in children may be identified. When these causes are clearly identified, a better solution can be found as well. In the light of the above discussion, the following hypotheses were developed:

- I. Avoidant parenting style has a significant positive relationship with total anxiety and functions of school refusal behavior in children.
- II. Controlling parenting style has a significant positive relationship with total anxiety, obsessive compulsive tendencies and functions of school refusal behavior in children.
- III. Supportive parenting style has a significant negative relationship with total anxiety and functions of school refusal behavior in children.
- IV. Aggressive parenting style has a significant positive relationship with total anxiety and functions of school refusal behavior in children.
- V. Compassionate parenting style has a significant negative relationship with total anxiety and functions of school refusal behavior in children.

Method

Design and Sample

A cross-sectional study design was used for this research. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample from the study population. Data was collected from 150 school going children within the age range of 5-13 years and from their mothers. The mean age of children was 6.83 years ($SD=2.04$). No particular age range for mothers was required. The sample was collected from both private and public schools. Children from single parent families were excluded.

Measures

Demographic information collected from the participants included their age, birth order, gender, school type, family system, monthly income, father's and mother's education, number of schools changed in the past, number of absences from school during the last month, the number of best friends of the child and the number of siblings.

Parenting style scale (PSS) is an indigenous measure that we used to assess the parenting styles of mothers. The scale was developed by Batool and Mumtaz (2013). The scale comprises 48 items. The answer to each question is given on a

five-point Likert scale, where a score of 5 denotes ‘always’ and a score of 1 denotes ‘never’. Items 1,3,9,11,24 and 43 of the scale are reverse scored. The scale has six subscales which represent different parenting styles corresponding to the various parenting styles of parents in Pakistan. The scale is a reliable measure and Cronbach’s alpha values of the factors of PSS ranged from .62 to .77.

Spence Children’s Anxiety Scale (SCAS) was developed by Spence (1998) to measure the different forms of anxiety in children in accordance with their criterion in DSM IV. It has a composite score determining total anxiety and six subscales catering to different forms of anxiety. It is scored on a four-point frequency scale in which 0 denotes ‘never’, 1 denotes ‘sometimes’, 2 denotes ‘often’ and 3 denotes ‘always’. It has a total of 45 items. The reliability of the total score of SCAS was quite high with a Cronbach’s alpha value of .93.

School refusal assessment scale-R-C was developed by Kearney and Silverman (1993). It comprises 24 items which are used in collaboration with the parent version of SRAS. It uses a seven-point frequency scale in which 0 stands for “never”, 1 for “seldom”, 2 for “sometimes”, 3 for “half the time”, 4 for “usually”, 5 for “almost always” and 6 for “always”. It measures school refusal in terms of four functions. The test re-test reliability of the scale was also adequate (mean $r=.68$). This scale was developed by Kearney and Silverman in 1993. It comprises 24 items that are used in collaboration with the child version of the SRAS. The scale uses a seven-point frequency scale in which 0 stands for “never”, 1 means “seldom”, 2 means “sometimes”, 3 means “half the time”, 4 means “usually”, 5 means “almost always” and 6 means “always”. The scale measures school refusal as reported by parents in terms of four functions. The scores for each function of both the child and the parent version of the scale are averaged to get the final score for school refusal.

Procedure

First of all, permission to use the above mentioned scales was taken from the respective authors. The age range of SCAS is 7 years and above; however, the age range of children sampled for this research was 5 – 13 years, since school refusal usually occurs in the first years of schooling. Thus, special permission to use SCAS was taken from Dr. Spence in order to apply it on a younger sample. She granted permission and also instructed to clearly read out the items of the scale to the participants and to make sure that they understood what was required from them. Thus, special care was taken for collecting data from the younger participants. On the contrary, PSS is an indigenous scale and it has been translated already into the Urdu language. The Urdu translation of SCAS is also available online. Thus,

SRAS-R (both child and parent versions) were the only ones translated into Urdu by a student doing MPhil in Urdu literature. Once the translation was complete, back translation into English was done by a student doing MPhil in English literature. The back translation was found to be satisfactory and hence the Urdu translation was used in this research. Once the scales were ready and permissions were gained from the authors, schools were approached for data collection. Government Girls High School, a small private school and the Educators school (boys' campus) in Gujrat were approached for data collection. Permission was granted and we visited the said schools for data collection. Children were handed out forms that contained SCAS and SRAS-R-C, while mothers were given forms that contained PSS and SRAS-R-P. Children were then given clear instructions about filling out each form according to how they felt in their everyday lives. Mothers were asked to answer the items of PSS according to how they raised their children; they were explicitly told that their data shall be kept confidential and thus they need not worry about any social implications of data. It was then made clear to both children and their mothers that the forms were not test papers and there were no right or wrong answers. Children who were 7 and above easily filled out the forms and were given help whenever they had difficulty understanding an item of any scale. For the younger children, each item was read aloud and explained clearly. They were informed explicitly about the meaning of each item and how to choose its response. It took the children approximately 20-25 minutes to fill out the forms. The younger children took approximately 30 minutes to fill out each form, while the mothers took approximately 15 minutes to fill out their forms.

Data Analysis

The collected data was then analyzed using SPSS (version 21). The relationship between various parenting styles and total anxiety in children was explored using correlation analysis. The relationship between different parenting styles and functions of school refusal was also assessed using correlation analysis. Simple linear regression was applied after the results of correlation analysis between parenting styles and total anxiety were found to be significant to see if certain parenting styles acted as predictors of total anxiety in children. Independent sample *t*-test was used to determine the difference between male and female participants in total anxiety and functions of school refusal.

Results

Statistical tests used in this research included independent sample *t*-test, correlation and regression.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Analysis to Find the Relationship between Different Types of Parenting Styles and Functions of School Refusal (N=150)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. CNPS	-	-.06	-.03	-.03	.14	.35**	.01	.01	-.05	.02
2. CMPS	-	-	.37**	-.22**	-.12	.069	-.29**	-.28**	-.06	.07
3. SPS	-	-	-	-.16	.06	.50**	-.06	-.17*	.12	-.04
4. AVPS	-	-	-	-	.30**	-.13	.19*	.12	-.09	.01
5. AGPS	-	-	-	-	-	.22**	.17*	-.02	.09	.019
6. CVPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.001	-.12	.03	-.03
7. F1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.52**	.49**	.39**
8. F2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.42**	.27**
9. F3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.35**
10. F4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. CNPS= Controlling parenting style, CMPS= Compassionate parenting style, SPS= Supportive parenting style, AVPS= Avoidant parenting style, AGPS= Aggressive parenting style, CVPS= Conventional parenting style, F1= Function 1; Avoidance of Anxiety provoking situations at school, F2= Function 2; Avoidance of aversive social situations at school, F3= Function 3; Attention seeking, F4= Function 4; Attaining tangible rewards, p value significant at the level: *p<.05, **p<.01

Table 1 shows that there was a highly significant, weak and negative relationship between compassionate parenting style and Function 1 ($r = -.29, p < .01$), between compassionate parenting style and Function 2 ($r = -.28, p < .01$), and between supportive parenting style and Function 2 ($r = -.17, p < .05$). It also shows a weak, significant and positive relationship between avoidant parenting style and Function 1 ($r = .19, p < .05$) as well as between aggressive parenting style and Function 1 ($r = .17, p < .05$) (see Table 1).

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Analysis to Find the Relationship between Different Parenting Styles and Different Types of Anxieties (n=150)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. CNPS	-	-.06	-.03	-.03	.14	.35**	.19	.39**	-.01	-.01	.14	.17*	.20*
2. CMPS	-	-	.37**	-.22**	-.121	.069	.008	-.08	.04	-.01	-.15	-.13	-.09
3. SPS	-	-	-	-.16	.06	.50**	-.14	-.24**	.004	-.20*	-.07	-.37**	-.24**
4. AVPS	-	-	-	-	.30**	-.13	.001	.11	.18*	.11	.03	.09	.12
5. AGPS	-	-	-	-	-	.22**	-.08	-.11	-.03	-.20*	-.04	.09	-.14
6. CVPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.005	-.02	.07	-.32**	.07	-.10	-.07
7. SEP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.37**	.53**	.19*	.49**	.47**	.69**
8. OC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.69**	.47**	.35**	.46**	.80**
9. PA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.35**	.34**	.48**	.63**
10. PIF	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.19*	.47**	.63**
11. GA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.42**	.75**
12. SP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.79**
13. TA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. CNPS= Controlling parenting style, CMPS= Compassionate parenting style, SPS= Supportive parenting style, AVPS= Avoidant parenting style, AGPS= Aggressive parenting style, CVPS= Conventional parenting style, SEP= Separation anxiety, OC= Obsessive compulsive disorder, PA= Panic disorder and agoraphobia, GA= Generalized anxiety disorder, SP= Social phobia, TA= Total anxiety, p value significant at the level: *p<.05, **p<.01

Table 2 shows that there was a significant, positive but weak relationship between controlling parenting style and obsessive compulsive subscale ($r=.39$, $p<.01$), between controlling parenting style and social phobia ($r=.17$, $p<.05$), between avoidant parenting style and panic / agoraphobia subscale ($r=.18$, $p<.05$), and between controlling parenting style and total anxiety ($r=.20$, $p<.05$). There was a significant, negative and weak relationship between supportive parenting style and obsessive compulsive subscale ($r=-.24$, $p<.01$), between supportive parenting style and physical injury ($r=-.20$, $p<.05$), between supportive parenting style and social phobia ($r=-.37$, $p<.01$), between aggressive parenting style and physical injury subscale ($r=-.20$, $p<.05$), and between conventional parenting style and physical injury subscale ($r=-.32$, $p<.01$). The results further showed a highly significant, weak and negative relationship between supportive parenting style and total anxiety ($r=-.24$, $p<.05$) (see Table 2).

Table 3

Multiple Linear Regression Predicting the Effect of Different Parenting Styles on Total Anxiety Scores in Children (N=150)

Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Controlling	.52	.12	.22**	2.60
Compassionate	.03	.18	.01	.12
Supportive	-.82	.25	-.21*	-2.10
Avoidant	.89	.27	.17*	2.07
Aggressive	-.86	.21	-.22**	-2.59
Conventional	.11	.23	.03	.290
R^2	.111			
F	4.09**			

Note. p value significant at the level: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$

Table 3 shows that controlling parenting style was a highly significant predictor of total anxiety in children ($\beta=.22$, $p<.01$), while supportive parenting style was a significant negative predictor of total anxiety in children ($\beta = -.21$, $p<.05$). Avoidant parenting style was also a significant predictor of total anxiety in children ($\beta = .17$, $p>.05$), while aggressive parenting style was a highly significant negative predictor of total anxiety in children ($\beta = -.22$, $p<.01$). The results also accounted for an 11.1% variance in total anxiety, $R^2=.111$, $F(6,143) = 4.09$, $p<.01$ (see Table 3).

Table 4

Independent Sample t-test to Determine Gender Difference in Total Anxiety and Functions of School Refusal (N=150)

Variables	Male	Female	t(148)	Confidence Interval		Cohen's d
	M(SD)	M(SD)		Lower limit	Upper limit	
Total Anxiety	38.60(14.36)	49.51(16.20)	-3.58***	-16.94	-4.89	0.49
Function 1	12.76(5.94)	11.51(5.79)	1.11	-.97	3.47	-.14
Function 2	11.18(6.93)	10.49(6.44)	.54	-1.81	3.19	-.10
Function 3	20.45(10.68)	15.30(9.29)	2.77**	1.47	8.82	-.51
Function 4	19.03(6.97)	16.98(7.32)	1.47	-.72	4.82	-.29

Note. p value significant at the level: ***p<.001 **p<.01 *p<.05

Table 4 shows that female participants scored significantly higher on total anxiety (M=49.51, SD=16.20) as compared to male participants (M=38.60, SD=14.36) = -3.58, P<.001. Moreover, males scored significantly higher on Function 3 of school refusal (M=20.45, SD=10.68) as compared to females (M=15.30, SD=9.29) = 2.77, P<.01 (see Table 4).

Discussion

The current study was conducted to determine the relationship certain parenting styles may have with school refusal behavior and anxiety. It was conducted with a sample of 150 children and their mothers. The following discussion outlines how the findings of this study relate with the previous literature and what implications they may have for our society.

Keeping in view the first hypothesis, our research affirmed that controlling parenting style had a positive and significant relationship with the total level of anxiety in children. This finding also supports the previously established results which created a link between controlling parenting style and anxiety. A study by Benoit (2009) produced similar findings. Controlling parents often place high demands on children and give them little to no freedom of choice. Consequently, it forces them to constantly live up to parental expectations and this can cause them to experience elevated levels of anxiety.

The tendency of controlling parents to provoke a sense of urgency in their children to do what the parent said and to do it perfectly can cause them to feel a

sense of nervousness and anxiety. The nervousness that entails such parental interactions can become a risk factor for children and induce them to develop obsessive compulsive tendencies. This research further affirmed the existence a positive relationship between obsessive compulsive subscale of SCAS and the controlling parenting style. This finding thus provides ample support to the previous research conducted by Aycicegi et al. (2011), who found controlling and manipulative parents to be a risk factor for the development of obsessive compulsive tendencies in their children.

Furthermore, the current research also yielded a significant positive relationship between controlling parenting style and social phobia subscale of SCAS in children. This finding also broadens the effect that controlling strategies may have on children. When children lack autonomy and have no freedom of choice, they tend to experience great stress and anxiety while facing social situations in which they can't avoid being scrutinized by others.

Moreover, regression analysis also proved controlling parenting style to be a significant positive predictor of total anxiety in children. The above established correlations and the results of regression analysis did affirm that controlling parenting style may aid in the development of anxiety in children.

It was hypothesized that avoidant parenting style has a significant positive relationship with anxiety in children. The findings affirmed this hypothesis and regression analysis proved the avoidant parenting style as a significant and positive predictor of total anxiety in children. This finding is in line with the previous literature. As previously found by Lungrini (2015), there was a negative correlation between more responsive fathers and anxiety in children. It shows that an unresponsive, uninvolved and ultimately an avoidant parent can pose a risk factor for a child and may cause the child to develop elevated levels of anxiety.

Avoidant parents were also found to have a significant and positive relationship with panic disorder and agoraphobia subscale of SCAS. This finding also affirms the negative impact of avoiding a child. Remaining uninvolved and disinterested in children can lead them to feel unsupported by their families and thus they feel alone in dealing with life's problems. Consequently, the children can feel overwhelmed and may experience a prevailing lack of control over things which can then manifest itself into panic disorder.

However, supportive parenting style is quite the opposite of avoidant parenting style and hence it was hypothesized that it has a negative and significant relationship with the levels of anxiety found in children. This hypothesis was

confirmed by the current research as a negative but significant relationship was found between supportive parenting style and total anxiety. The more the children feel secure and supported, the less they will be at a risk to develop anxiety. A longitudinal study by Steinberg et al. (1994) established the advantages of authoritative parenting style for better psychosocial competence of adolescents which further supports this notion.

Supportive parenting style was also found to be significantly negatively correlated with obsessive compulsive subscale, physical injury fear subscale and social phobia. These findings are in line with previous literature and affirm that taking interest in children's activities in a healthy manner and providing them with support yields better psychological outcomes.

Moreover, regression analysis showed that supportive parenting style was a significant negative predictor of total anxiety in children. This finding corresponds with the previous findings and provides sufficient empirical evidence regarding the positive effects of supportive parenting style.

Keeping in view the above relationships between parenting styles and anxiety levels in children, it was also hypothesized that aggressive parenting style has a positive and significant relationship with anxiety in children. This hypothesis was not confirmed by this research. On the contrary, the results showed that aggressive parenting style had a significant negative relationship with physical injury fear subscale of SCAS. Regression analysis further showed that aggressive parenting style was a significant negative predictor of total anxiety in children. These findings were not anticipated in the light of previous literature. The reason behind them may be an indicator of the differences in the western culture and the Pakistani culture. While the western culture is based on an individualistic view of the society, our culture tilts more towards collectivism. Thus, family values and respect are highly regarded and children are disciplined strictly in order to maintain these values. Aggressive parents are involved in their children's life but their parenting strategies are somewhat aggressive which is considered normal in our society. Consequently, these strategies don't have as bad an impact on children as they may have in the western society. The rationale of an average child in the Pakistani society is that parents can become physically aggressive but it is for the child's own benefit. This collectivistic rationale of children perhaps builds a collective bond among them and lowers their risk of developing anxiety. Another reason could be the lack of data on fathers' parenting style. In Pakistan, mothers and fathers usually have opposite parenting styles and it is the balance of the two that contributes in the development

of children. Thus, the key to understanding this situation may lie in the parenting style of fathers.

It was also hypothesized that compassionate parenting style has a significant negative relationship with total anxiety in children. This hypothesis was not supported; however, conventional parenting style was found to have a negative and significant relationship with physical injury fear subscale of SCAS. Conventional parenting style comprises the orthodox ways of parenting and it may be linked to positive outcomes for children in our society.

The relationship between functions of school refusal and parenting style is a relatively new finding. A previously conducted research by Schafer (2011) linked familial environment with the four functions of school refusal. Keeping in view the previous findings, it was hypothesized that Function 1 of school refusal has a significant positive relationship with avoidant parenting style. This hypothesis was confirmed. These findings indicate that disinterested and/or avoidant parents may cause their children to refuse school because such children may fear facing a challenge at school, be it in any form. Thus, the lack of self-confidence gives rise to negative feelings and builds on negative reinforcement that causes aversion from school.

It was further hypothesized that compassionate parents have a significant negative relationship with Function 1 of school refusal. This hypothesis was confirmed. Compassionate parents provide a healthy and balanced life to their children by allowing them autonomy based on certain rules and thus a negative relationship with Function 1 was anticipated.

Another link of Function 1 of school refusal was found with aggressive parenting style. Aggressive parenting style was found to have a significant positive relationship with Function 1 of school refusal. Children of aggressive parents come to fear the main authoritarian figure of the household and thus may associate the same fear with teachers at school. Such a behavior can cause the children to refuse school by associating the aggressive authority figure with the teacher at school, the school bus driver or even feel intimidated by a test. These negative associations then negatively reinforce school refusal.

Function 2 was hypothesized to have a significant positive relationship with controlling parenting style and a significant negative relationship with supportive parenting style. The former hypothesis was not confirmed while the latter was confirmed. These results are somewhat inconsistent as controlling parenting style is more at risk of creating anxiety linked to social settings. This result was not

anticipated but since no other parenting style showed any positive relationship with Function 2, it is safe to assume that a lack of support is the key to nurture Function 2 of school refusal. Furthermore, the results also revealed a significant negative relationship of compassionate parenting style with Function 2 of school refusal. Both these findings are consistent as the lack of support and compassion on the part of parents can cause their children to avoid aversive social settings.

It was hypothesized that controlling parenting style has a significant positive relationship with Function 3 of school refusal. This hypothesis was not confirmed by the current research. The reason may be a generally prevailing trend in our culture that values keeping children quite close to their parents and restrictions are imposed on them that are borderline overprotective. Such restrictions are upheld as the norm. Thus, a normalization of controlling parents in Pakistan might be the cause of not having a relationship with Function 3 of school refusal. This finding is also consistent with the correlation between parenting styles and subscales of anxiety. No significant relationship between controlling parenting style and separation anxiety was found.

Aggressive parenting style was also hypothesized to have a significant positive relationship with Function 4 of school refusal. This function is positively reinforced by seeking rewards outside the school and receiving those rewards. An aggressive style of parenting was thus hypothesized to cause children to seek rewards outside the school and away from the aggressive environment of home. No significant relationship was found between the two. These findings are, however, consistent with the aggressive parenting style being negatively correlated with anxiety. Indeed, the same rationale applies here, that is, cultural norms in Pakistan do not reject the controlling or aggressive form of parenting style and thus may not produce as many negative effects. Significant results were found only for negatively reinforced functions of school refusal and not for positively reinforced functions.

Finally, independent sample *t*-test was applied to determine gender differences for total anxiety and the functions of school refusal showed a significant gender difference regarding total anxiety. Females were found to have a higher anxiety level which is consistent with previous literature. There were no differences in functions of school refusal.

Implications of Research

The current research has implications for both clinical psychologists and the general population. Firstly, this research highlights the most effective forms of

parenting that contribute to the optimal development of children. This knowledge can be utilized by clinical psychologists for identifying the predisposing and precipitating factors involved in the development of children's anxiety disorders and/or school refusal behavior. This knowledge can also become a guideline for clinicians to formulate a management plan for children to tackle any distress and anxiety related to school or otherwise. Moreover, it also provides awareness and guidance to parents in general to identify their parenting styles or certain parental traits that may prove to be harmful or detrimental for their children's development. Thus, the findings of this research work have widespread implications for both professionals and laypersons.

Limitations, Suggestions and Conclusion

The current research is not without its limitations. One limitation was the fact that there was a much larger number of females in the sample as compared to males. So, future research may be carried out with an equal number of female and male participants. The current research was based on data collected only from mothers and the considerable effect the fathers' parenting style may have on children was not explored in this research. The current sample also included a large number of children from low-income families which may have had an effect on overall results. Thus, future research on this topic can be conducted after selecting a more economically diverse group of participants.

The current research has yielded significant results; some of these results are consistent with the results of previous researches while others are not. This difference can be accounted by the differences in the western and the Pakistani culture. The results did show that controlling and avoidant parenting styles had a negative effect on children's anxiety levels regardless of cultural differences. Furthermore, supportive and compassionate parenting styles proved to be the most effective in rearing children with better and more balanced psychological outcomes, such as lower anxiety levels. A new finding was the negative impact that aggressive parents had on anxiety levels in our culture that needs to be further researched and explored. In terms of the functions of school refusal, Functions 1 and 2 were found to have a significant positive relationship with avoidant and aggressive parents, while a negative relationship was found to exist between these functions and supportive and compassionate parents. Functions 3 and 4 did not yield any significant results in relation to parenting styles.

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