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Can Parenting Style Affect Thought Control Strategies?

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed at investigating the relationship between the parenting styles of parents and their children's thought control strategies. The research method was descriptive and correlational.

Methods: The research method was descriptive and correlational. Statistical population included all pre-university students and their parents in the academic year 2013-2014 in Mashhad City. Some 177 female students and their parents were selected as the statistical sample, using cluster random sampling method from the same area of education. Research tools included Parenting Styles Questionnaire and Thought Control Questionnaire. The data were analyzed by using statistical methods, correlation and regression analysis.

Findings: The results indicated that authoritative parenting style has a direct positive relationship with distraction and reappraisal strategies and negatively with worry strategy. Authoritarian parenting style has only significant relationship with social control and worry strategies. The results of multiple regression showed that authoritative parenting style plays a role in explaining 35% of the variance of thought control as dependent variable.

Conclusion: This study consistently provides support for the link between variations in the familial environment and the emergence of metacognitive subsequent outcomes. Authoritative style had great effect on the appropriate thought control strategies naming distraction and reappraisal strategies.

Keywords: Thought control strategies, Distraction, Parenting styles

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Introduction

There is mounting evidence that supports the correlation between the quality of parent-child relationship and children's performance [1-5]. Almost all psychological theories testify that parent-child relationship may generate psychological disorders like anxiety, depression (O'Connor & Scott, 2007), and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), characterized by intrusive thoughts. This distresses the individual and may bring about recurrent mental rituals or behaviors interfering with one's functionality [6-8].

Several explanations about the progress of anxiety disorders have been given by different cognitive models. The current cognitive-behavioral models related to anxiety disorders are in line with the cognitive specificity hypothesis of Beck's (1976). Accordingly, different types of psychopathology and anxiety disorders are the result of dysfunctional beliefs, leading to misinterpreting normal negative intrusive thoughts. This, in turn, can lead to anxiety. Meta-Cognitive Model as a cognitive model suggests that people's meanings and beliefs on their cognitive structures as well as their thought control strategies have great effect on many psychological disorders including OCD [9, 10]. This model implies that salient intrusive thoughts can cause negative interpretations about the importance, meaning and results of these thoughts, ending with fear, anxiety, guilt and distress. These feelings are clear evidences, demonstrating the reality of intrusive thoughts. To cope with the perceived threat and danger, numerous behavioral reactions and strategies have been developed [11].

Intrusive thought-oriented control strategies are believed to escalate the prevalence of these intrusive thoughts, and thus cause personal discomfort and distress [12, 13]. According to Tolin, Worhunsky, Brady and Maltby, putting too much importance on intrusive thoughts and trying to control them can end with the excess use of dysfunctional strategies [14].

Not all people may develop dysfunctional beliefs and misinterpret their intrusive thoughts. This is life experiences that form our basic assumptions about ourselves and the world [9]. The assumptions, acquired from a strict upbringing factor such as parenting styles, reinforce certain attitudes and beliefs toward responsibility [15].

There are many reports in the literature on the role of parenting on children's development. Baumrind (1971) focused on different parenting styles as well as dimensions of warmth and control. The results characterized three parental authority styles (i.e. permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian), as being either high or low on the mentioned dimensions [16].

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A positive relationship has been reported between obsessional symptoms and the perception that one's parents are overly protective [17, 18]. On the other hand, low warmth control and perceived parental have association with OCD symptoms. There are some studies directly addressing the association between OC symptoms and Baumrind's parenting styles, proposing the interplay of "warmth" and "control."

Objective

To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies examining the possible relationship of parenting styles and thought control strategies. We conducted a detailed investigation on the relationship parenting styles and thought control strategies in this work. In line with Meta-Cognitive Model, it was assumed that there is a relationship between overuse of dysfunctional control strategies and the authoritarian parenting style of Baumrind. However, our prediction was that there is a relationship between authoritative parenting style associated with lower levels of dysfunctional control strategies.

Materials and Methods

This is a descriptive-analytic study of correlation type that has been performed for practical purposes. Statistical population included all pre-university students and their parents in the academic year 2013-2014 in Mashhad City, Iran. Based on Morgan population table for determining sample size, 177 female students and their parents were selected as the statistical sample, using cluster random sampling, from the same area of educational organization. For the statistical analysis, Pearson's correlation and regression analysis was used.

Measures

Thought Control Questionnaire (TCQ)

This 30-item self-report measure assesses the frequency of five strategies (distraction; punishment, reappraisal, social control, and worry) used by people to control their thoughts. The method of scoring the questionnaire is based on Likert's five-choice spectrum (*I totally agree, agree, do not comment, disagree, and totally disagree*). Wells & Davies (1994), makers of this questionnaire, estimated 0/64 to 0/79 Cranach's alpha coefficients for this questionnaire's subscales. Also the test-post-test results of this questionnaire in a six-week interval were as reappraisal (0/67), worry (0/71), social control (0/79), punishment (0/64), distraction (0/72), and total questionnaire (0/83) [19].

In an Iranian study, Goodarzi and Esmaeeli Torkanpoori (2006) reported Cranach's alpha coefficient to the total questionnaire as 0/81

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and to its subscales as: reappraisal (0/70), worry (0/70), social control (0/70), punishment (0/76), and distraction (0/79) [20].

Parenting Style Questionnaire

In this study, to assess parenting practices, the parenting style questionnaire of Dianna Baumrind (1972) was used [21]. This questionnaire measures three practices of parenting style including permissive, authoritative and authoritarian. This questionnaire has been translated into Persian by Esfandiari (1995) [22]. The questionnaire included 30 items with Likert scale methods, and with summing of the questions' scores related to any style three scores were obtained separately; a score that is higher and superior will be determined as a parenting style. The method of scoring the questionnaire is based on Likert's five-choice spectrum (I totally agree, agree, do not comment, disagree, and totally disagree). The minimum and maximum scores are 0 and 40, respectively for each parenting style. Esfandiari (1995) reported the reliability using test-retest with an interval of one week as 0.69 for permissive style, 0.77 for authoritarian style, and 0.73 for authoritative style. Also Ahmadi (2014) found the reliability of the questionnaire using test-retest with an interval of one week as 0.81 for permissive, 0.85 for authoritarian style, and 0.92 for authoritative style [22, 23]. In this study, the ethical standards such as voluntary participation in the study, and the confidentiality of the respondent information were taken into consideration.

Results

In order to investigate the first hypothesis of the research, which explains the relationship between authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting styles with thought control strategy, Pearson's correlation test was used. As shown in Table 1, based on the results of the correlation test, there is a positive and meaningful relationship between the authoritative parenting style and the thought control. Also there is no relationship between the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles and thought control.

Table 1: Relationship between authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting styles with thought control

Parenting style	Thought control	Correlation coefficient	P value
Authoritarian	Thought control	0.84	-0.014
Authoritative	Thought control	0.000	0.21
Permissive	Thought control	0.39	0.08

N=177, Significant at level of p <0.05

For the purpose of examining the second hypothesis of the research, which expresses the

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relationship between parenting styles and mind control components, the correlation test was used. The results of the correlation test indicated that there is a positive correlation between the authoritarian parenting style and the distraction, social control and worry components of thought control. The correlational coefficient of authoritative parenting style and distraction reappraisal is positive, direct and significant. As shown in Table 2, the correlation between worry and authoritative parenting style is negative and inverse.

Table 2: Relationship between authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting styles and thought control components (distraction, punishment, reappraisal, social control, and worry)

Parenting style / Thought control	Authoritarian		Authoritative		Permissive	
	R	P-Value	R	P-Value	R	P-Value
Distraction	0.35	0.00	0.29	0.00	0.12	0.11
Punishment	0.2	0.78	0.12	0.10	0.04	0.59
Reappraisal	-0.04	0.59	0.26	0.00	-0.01	0.80
Social control	0.28	0.00	0.18	0.01	0.35	0.64
Worry	0.33	0.00	-0.30	0.00	-0.13	0.08

N= 17, Significant at level of p <0.05

As shown in Table 3, whereas other variables are excluded from the analysis, regression analysis was carried out with authoritative parenting style score being the predictor variable and thought control score as the dependent variable (p<0.001).

Table 3: Regression analysis to predict thought control scores

Variable	B	β	R^2	R	F
Authoritative	0.116	0.22	0.052	0.227	9.52

Discussion

When we speak of dysfunctional thought control strategies, we think of functional thought control strategies that can prevent us from many psychological disorders. Functional thought control strategies, like other cognitive skills, are thought to be enhanced through social interaction [24].

Kurtz et al. (1990) stated that one important influence on children strategy and metacognitive development is presumed to be the instruction they receive from teachers and parents [25]. Many researchers believe that metacognitive development is facilitated by some types of adult teaching strategies, including those encouraging the children to plan, coordinate their ongoing activities, and evaluate their progress [26].

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Clinical psychology defines metacognition as the psychological structures, knowledge, events, and processes involved in the control, modification and interpretation of thinking itself [27]. In fact, it deals with "the aspect of the information processing system that monitors, interprets, evaluates, controls, and regulates the contents and processes of its own organization" [28].

Metacognition helps to monitor what is stored in the memory and control future processing [28]; these operations contribute to understanding cognition in psychopathology [29]. As the input process for regulating self-relevant information, monitoring depends largely on the individuals' subjective report [29]. Thus, any error or distortion in monitoring gives rise to psychological disturbance [29].

Based on the metacognitive theory of psychological disorders, dysfunctional beliefs about cognitions form the basis of the development and maintenance of clinical problems [29]. Accordingly, the metacognitive approach deals with both cognitive activities and metacognitive dimensions of thinking. More specifically, beliefs about an individual's own cognition (metacognitive knowledge) and specific cognitive-regulatory processes (metacognitive regulation) have a fundamental role in psychopathology [30].

Parenting styles and practices regarding the activity of children in the early years have a great effect on their metacognitive ability [31, 32]. Apparently, authoritative parents provide their children with an opportunity for more development in their cognitive and metacognitive aspects [33]. Such parents direct the children in a rational manner [34], and encourage give and take; however, they share the reasoning behind their rules. These parents attempt to have a firm control over their children though the children are not tied up with restrictions [34].

Authoritative parents value their children's personal interests and qualities, as well as the rights of being an adult. Standards for future conduct are set, and decisions are not according to group consensus decisions or based on the children's desires. At the same time parents are not considered to be the final authority. Here, it is assumed that authoritative control may gain responsible agreement with group standards without any individual autonomy or self-assertiveness loss. By reasoning, the authoritative parents teach their children to look for reasons behind directives, and thus to exercise their option to conform or cope with the outcomes [35].

Children of authoritative parents gain higher score in competence, achievement, social development, self-perceptions, and mental health measures than the children raised by other parenting styles [36].

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Conclusion

Metacognition is defined as any knowledge or cognitive process that contributes to appraisal, supervision or control of the cognition [37, 38]. This concept contains all cognitive information and some specific metacognitive areas associated with psychological disorders [27]. The main idea is that metacognitive factors play a vital role in determining the maladaptive thinking styles in psychological disorders [39]. According to Flavell (1993), higher rates of negative or intrusive and subjectively uncontrollable thoughts are reportedly the main characteristics in the majority of mental disorders [40-42].

Our findings revealed a link between familial environment changes and the onset of metacognition outcomes [43,30]. "Parenting style" is a construct that is able to capture normal variations of the parents' attempts in controlling and socializing their children [44]. Categorizing parents depending on their demandingness and responsiveness level or degree establishes a typology of indulgent, authoritarian, authoritative, and neglectful parenting styles [45].

Salkovskis (1985) believes that assumptions about blame, responsibility, or control acquired from a strict upbringing or possibly parenting styles are important in creating obsessive compulsive disorder. They reinforce certain beliefs, codes of conduct, and attitudes toward responsibility [46, 47].

Self-regulation is another aspect of metacognition strategies that is affected by parenting style. According to Martins and Pons (1996), children are taught how to determine their purpose, planning, monitoring and performance control through observing their parent's performance [48]. Derowizeh (2005) found in his study that parental amicable relationship, particularly of mother, has the ability to predict self-regulation skills [49].

Another pathway deals with the influence of parenting on children's belief formation [43]. Parenting is believed to integrate parental practices, attitudes and non-verbal expression; these, in turn, may affect the parent–child interaction across various circumstances [50]. Based on developmental theories, the quality of parent–child bond [Bretherton (1985)] and parenting practices [Baumrind (1978)] may ease the development of children in different domains like values and beliefs formation [51-54].

According to Papageorgiou and Wells (2001), positive metacognitive beliefs consider the advantages or usefulness of rumination as a coping strategy. Parents having such beliefs transcend to their children through the above-mentioned pathways [30].

The present study shows that parenting styles, especially authoritative style have great effect on the appropriate thought control strategies. In

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authoritative style, the parents are demanding and responsive, and set clear standards for the conduct of their children's conduct. The disciplinary methods of these parents are supportive [44]. Authoritative parenting style is more conducive to the development of autonomy in children in compare to other parenting styles. People need autonomy to become fully functioning and self-supporting individuals. Authoritative parenting contributes to self-reliance and independence in children. The parents in this category maintain an appropriate control level over their children, and give autonomy to them when they assure that their children are ready to take responsibility in a specific area. These parents usually achieve moderate to high scores in involvement, family fun, and advice-giving, and low to moderate scores in parental control.

Ethical considerations

The authors of this article have done their utmost to trustworthy science and ethics.

Conflict of interest

This study did not deal with the interests of natural or legal persons.

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