

PARENTING STYLES AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR AMONG PRESCHOOL GOING CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at investigating the relationship and impact of parenting styles on aggressive behavior of preschool going children. It was hypothesized that authoritative parenting style will be negatively related to aggressive behavior while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles will be positively related to aggressive behavior of preschool going children and that parenting style will impact the preschool aggressive behaviors. The participants included 310 school going children and their parents. The aggressive behavior was measured by CBCL 1.5-5 (Rescorla, 2005) and parenting styles by Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (Robinson, Mandelco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001). Correlation analysis mostly indicated not significant relationship of parenting styles with aggressive behavior. Only the groups of 2 and 4 years old children, showed a significant correlation of aggression scale with gender ($r = -.231, p=.016$; $r = .383, p=.000$). Regressions illustrated that there was not a statistically significant interaction effect between parenting style and aggression in preschool children $F(2) = 1.045, p = .353; \eta^2 = .007$. We did not find significant interaction effect also between parent's gender $F(1) = .133, p = .716; \eta^2 = .00$ and parenting style * parent's gender $F(2) = .833, p = .436; \eta^2 = .005$. It was concluded that parenting styles have no relationship and no interaction with preschool children aggressive behavior.

Keywords: Parenting styles, aggressive behavior, preschool children, differences, age, and gender.

INTRODUCTION

Epidemiological research has shown that aggressive behavior is one of the most common types of behavioral problems in preschool children (Furniss, Beyer, Guggenmos, 2006; Petermann, Helmsen, Koglin, 2010). From a phenomenological perspective, aggression is a broad construct that encompasses a wide variety of behaviors that are intended to hurt or harm others (Dodge, Coie, Lynam, 2006). Studies on aggression in children has shown that development is influenced by multiple factors and processes, including temperament (Rothbart, 2007), socialization (Lochman, 2004), contextual factors (Leventhal, & Brooks-Gunn, 2004; Lochman, 2004), attachment (most relevantly aggression) (Bates, Maslin, & Frankel, 1985; McCartney, Owen, Booth, Clarke-Stewart, & Vandell, 2004). Aggressive children are more susceptible to numerous aversive outcomes, including internalizing (Murray-Close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007) and relationship problems (Pepler, Jiang, Craig, & Connolly, 2008).

Gender differences generated controversy debate among developmental psychologists over time (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996; Moffitt et al., 2001). Studies revealed that the development of aggression from its onset in infancy have consistently reported that gender differences were evident well before the period of adolescence (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998). Archer & Côté, (2005) in their study concluded that gender differences were already evident among toddlers and, therefore, such differences were too early to be the result of a gendered socialization process.

A more recent study reported that gender differences in aggression (e.g., angry moods, hitting) were not evident in a sample of 12-month-old infants (Hay et al., 2011), but they were evident at 17 months old (Baillargeon et al., 2007). It first appeared to researchers that gender differences increased during the preschool (Hay, Nash, et al., 2011). Also, according to Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, (2008), gender differences in aggression are well documented in early childhood. The most recent meta-analysis of gender differences in aggression analyzed 148 studies and found a small to moderate effect of $r = .29$ for direct aggression (Card, Stucky, 11 Sawalani, & Little, 2008). However, the effects for indirect aggression were negligible.

The definition of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting style, can be achieved by examining differing levels of the dimensions of acceptance and rejection, behavioral control, and psychological control that are unique to each style (Kimble, 2009). Authoritative parents are those who are high on acceptance and behavioral control, but low on psychological control (Baumrind 2013; Baumrind et al., 2010). Authoritarian parents are rejecting and psychologically controlling. (Baumrind, 2013; Baumrind et al., 2010). This parenting type has been related to less optimal child outcomes, including lower self-efficacy (Baumrind et al., 2010), more externalizing problems (Maccoby & Martin, 1983), and rebellion (Baumrind, 1968). Permissive parents promote psychological autonomy, are accepting, and exhibit lax behavioral control (Baumrind, 2013; Baumrind et al., 2010).

Studies on parenting styles has shown that authoritarian parents' use of power assertive techniques (e.g., physical punishment, threats, belittling statements) is often interpreted as signs of parental rejection by their children. Moreover, these power-assertive techniques are detrimental because they model aversive behaviors as an effective way of resolving conflict with others (Hart et al., 1992). There is strong supporting evidence for Patterson and colleagues' view that harsh parenting leads to the development of behavior problems and aggression (Snyder, Cramer, Afrank, & Patterson, 2005; Snyder, Reid, & Patterson, 2003). Other study results shows that parent discipline strategies have important consequences for the development of aggressive behavior (Lansford et al., 2002).

Some punitive parenting behaviors may be relationally aggressive in nature (e.g., love withdrawal). If a child is frequently exposed to these parenting behaviors, the child might begin to use these same sorts of behaviors in their interactions with peers (Laible, Carlo, Torquati, & Ontai, 2004). Another study by Stocker (2000) found that mother-child hostility and lack of parental monitoring were each positively associated with adolescents' use of relational aggression with their peers. However, emerging research suggests that parental responsiveness buffers the effects of harsh discipline (Deater-Deckard, Ivy, & Petrill, 2006; McLoyd & Smith, 2002)

Among parenting styles, the most exceptionally harmful example is abusive parenting, which is usually characterized by frequent use of physical discipline that can cause injury in victims. Herrenkohl and Russo (2001) reported that maternal use of physical discipline at school age was related to ongoing teacher-reported aggressive behavior in children. A recent meta-analytic study by Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley and Roisman (2010) showed that attachment security was more firmly associated with externalizing problems in boys than in girls, but if the scope of measures is narrowed down to aggression only, there does not seem to be an unanimous pattern of results. Based on the few studies reviewed above, a possibility is that the interaction between attachment and gender on aggression is further moderated by age. It can be assumed that before and at preschool age,

variation in attachment security accounts for more variation in aggression for girls than for boys (Casas et al., 2006)

Therefore, parents who are inconsistent in their approach towards their child can unintentionally promote negative child behaviour, which can lead to a mutual escalation into negative behaviour from both (Rutter, et al., 2008). In families where the focus is on negative behaviour, prosocial behaviour often goes unrecognised and nonviolent conflict resolution is neither taught, nor modelled (Patterson 1982). Reducing harsh, negative and inconsistent parenting has been shown to have a positive influence on children's behaviour in a number of studies (Eyberg, Nelson, & Boggs, 2008; Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008); once parents have been shown the skills to manage problem behaviour, levels of antisocial behaviour in children can return to a normal level (Jouriles, McDonald, Rosenfield, CorbittShindler, Stephens, & Miller, 2009).

Our study had two specific aims: (1) to test the correlation between parenting style and preschool aggressive behaviors; (2) to test the impact of parenting style, parent gender, child age and gender on preschool aggressive behaviors. It was hypothesized that authoritative parenting style will be negatively related to aggressive behavior while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles will be positively related to aggressive behavior of preschool going children and that parenting style will impact the preschool aggressive behaviors.

METHODOLOGY

The study sample

The sample included 310 preschool children (163 or 52.6% boys and 147 or 47.4% girls), with a mean age of 2.9 years (range: 2-4 years). 108 of them (34.8%) were 2 years old; 97 of them (31.3%) were three years old and 105 or 33.9 % from the total number of children were 4 years old. Participants attended 12 public and private preschool centers in different rural and urban areas of Pristina. In the chi-square test, no important differences were reported in the distribution of the percentages of gender and age representation in this study. From 310 parents participated in the study, 253 of them or 81.6 % were mothers, while only 57 of them or 18.4 % were fathers. In the chi-square test, there were important differences reported in the distribution of the percentages of parent's gender. They voluntarily completed the questionnaire. The response participation rate was 63.8 %.

Table 1: Descriptive data for children by gender and age and for parents by gender.

	Valid Nr.	Percentile	Chi-square test
Male	163	52.6	
Female	147	47.4	$\chi^2 (1) = .826, p = .363$
2 years old	108	34.8	
3 years old	97	31.3	$\chi^2 (1) = .626, p = .731$
4 years old	105	33.9	
Fathers	57	18.4	$\chi^2 (1) = 123.923, p = .000$
Mothers	253	81.6	

Instruments and data collection

Parents' report of aggressive behavior was measured using scores from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL 1.5-5; Achenbach, 1991b). CBCL 1.5 - 5 were designed to provide normed scores on a wide array of behavioral and emotional problem scales in young children

(Rescorla, 2005). The CBCL contains 99 items intended to measure problem behavior, rated 0-1-2 (0 = *not true (as far as you know)*; 1 = *somewhat or sometimes true*; or 2 = *very true or often true*) plus 1 open-ended problem items. The CBCL syndrome scales have been shown to have a consistency of .826.

This measure has been validated internationally, as well as in clinical and nonclinical samples. The CBCL for preschoolers has been used in over 200 published studies and its validity and reliability are well documented (Rescorla, 2005). The questionnaire was completed individually by each participant and returned to the author of the study within one week. Parenting styles have been widely studied in recent research and have been related to many parent characteristics and child outcomes. Parenting Style & Dimensions Questionnaire was developed by Robinson and Mandleco in 1995, which was internationally recognized as one of the scales with the parents as the respondents to evaluate the parenting style. Since it is developed, the scale has been revised and used by scholars all over the world and is demonstrated to have good reliability and validity (Robinson, Mandleco, & Olsen, 2001). The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001) is one measure that is widely utilized in current research to examine parenting styles (see review by Olivari, Tagliabue, & Confalonieri, 2013). Parents (253 or 81.6% mothers and 57 or 18.4 % fathers) completed the Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ) (Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001). The PPQ yields self-report information from each parent as well as each parent's perceptions of their partners' interactions (when appropriate) with their child. The PPQ is composed of three subscales: An authoritative pattern (27 items; e.g., "Is responsive to our child's feelings or needs"), an authoritarian pattern 1 (20 items; e.g., "Explodes in anger towards our child"), and a permissive pattern (15 items; e.g., "Ignores our child's misbehavior").

The response scale for each item ranges from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Scores for each child on each subscale were computed by summing responses to each item. In the present sample reliabilities for mother self-reports has been shown with Cronbach's alpha of .86, .81, and .71 for the authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive subscales, respectively (Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001). The data were collected at direct meetings with mothers, who were previously informed about the purpose of the study and agreed to participate voluntarily in the research. The questionnaire was completed individually by each participant and returned to the author of the study within one week. On their' request the questionnaire was anonymous.

The procedure of data analysis

The statistical package SPSS for Windows, version 19 was used to analyse the quantitative data collected. During the analysis a specific code was used for the identification of information for each child and mother. In order to identify the potential correlation between parenting style and aggressive behaviour of preschool children, the Pearson's correlation was used. T-test and one-way ANOVA were used to explore the differences among the groups regarding the age and gender.

RESULTS

To characterize the sample population, the outcome variable was stratified by demographic variables. Table 2 shows the difference in number, mean scores and standard deviations by age, gender and parenting style

Table 2: Number, Mean scores and standard deviations for aggressive scale by age, gender and parenting style

	Parenting style	Gender	Number	Aggression scale	
				M	SD
2 years old	authoritative style	F	16	2.94	.680
		M	16	2.44	.512
		F+M	32	2.68	.644
	authoritarian style	F	29	2.55	.509
		M	22	2.27	.456
		F+M	51	2.41	.497
	permissive style	F	15	2.67	.724
		M	10	2.60	.516
		F+M	25	2.64	.638
3 years old	authoritative style	F	17	2.18	.393
		M	14	2.50	.519
		F+M	31	2.32	.475
	authoritarian style	F	28	2.57	.573
		M	18	2.78	.428
		F+M	46	2.65	.526
	permissive style	F	11	2.55	.688
		M	9	2.22	.441
		F+M	20	2.40	.598
4 years old	authoritative style	F	10	2.10	.316
		M	24	2.54	.721
		F+M	34	2.41	.657
	authoritarian style	F	15	2.00	.000
		M	34	2.76	.654
		F+M	49	2.53	.649
	permissive style	F	6	2.50	.548
		M	16	2.63	.619
		F+M	22	2.59	.590

In order to explore the relationship between parenting style and aggression of preschool children, the Pearson correlation was used. The result obtained, ($r^2 = .049$, $p = .387$) shows no significant correlation between variables. Further investigation was conducted according to age group: 2 years, 3 years, 4 years and gender (male, female). In all groups (regarding the age) children's aggression correlations with parenting style were not significant ($r = -.048$; $r = .371$; $r = .285$). In the groups of 2 and 4 years old children, aggression scale had a significant correlation with gender ($r = -.231$, $p = .016$; $r = .383$, $p = .000$)¹. In none of the groups (regarding the gender) children's aggression correlations with parenting style were not significant ($r = -.074$; $r = -.010$; $r = .013$).

Regression analyses were conducted to determine the relative importance of the three parenting styles on child aggression scale. Regressions illustrated that there was not a statistically significant interaction effect between parenting style and aggression in preschool children $F(2) = 1.045$, $p = .353$; $\eta^2 = .007$. We did not find significant interaction effect also between parent's gender and aggression in preschool children $F(1) = .133$, $p = .716$; $\eta^2 = .00$ and parenting style * parent's gender and aggression $F(2) = .833$, $p = .436$; $\eta^2 = .005$.

¹ Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

Parenting styles is being considered as a key factor implicated in the development of early-onset aggressive behaviors. The main aim of this study was to investigate the relationship of parenting styles with aggressive behavior of preschool going children and to explore the possible impact of parenting style on preschool children aggression. It was hypothesized that authoritative parenting style will be negatively related to aggressive behavior while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles will be positively related to aggressive behavior of preschool going children and that parenting style will impact the preschool aggressive behaviors.

Correlation analysis mostly indicated not significant relationship of parenting styles with aggressive behavior. Only the groups of 2 and 4 years old children, showed a significant correlation of aggression scale with gender ($r = -.231, p=.016$; $r = .383, p=.000$). Regressions illustrated that there was not a statistically significant interaction effect between parenting style, parent's gender and parenting style * parent's gender on preschool going children's aggression. These results are in direct contrast to a substantial body of research suggesting a strong predictive link between parenting styles and child behavior problems and aggression (Snyder, Cramer, Afrank, & Patterson, 2005; Snyder, Reid, & Patterson, 2003; Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley and Roisman, 2010).

The results revealed that 2 years old female children showed higher level of aggression than boys. Within increase of age, boys the boys showed highest values of aggressive behavior. These results are in line with other studies where sex differences have also been noted in the processes associated with the development of aggression in boys and in girls (Ladd & Ladd, 1998), as well as in the consequences of aggression for boys and girls. There is reasonable agreement about boys and girls differing in terms of prosocial orientation, and physical and relational aggression (Crick et al. 1999b; Leaper, 1994; Rubble & Martin, 1998). From the other side, the research literature reports on various effects of parental styles on child aggressiveness depending on the gender constellation between mothers, fathers, girls, and boys that is considered (e.g., Casas et al. 2006).

Future questions to be answered are whether parenting styles are correlated with demographic information such as age, education level, employment status, place of residence, number of family members etc. Longitudinal data would also be of value in extension to this cross-sectional analysis. Answers to these questions would be beneficial to programs working on childhood aggression.

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