



Effect of Mother's Psychological Characteristics on Efficacy Behaviors of Children

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT *This empirical paper examines the interrelations among the psychological characteristics of mothers. Neuroticism is a negative trait and researches suggest that it very significantly affects the psychological well being of an individual. Furthermore, mother's psychological characteristics were also correlated with efficacy behaviors of their children.*

This study was undertaken on children aged 8 to 12 years and their mothers. There were two groups of children and their mothers. One was chronically ill children group and their mothers, and other group was normal healthy children and their mothers. The sample comprised of 150 mothers and 150 children. In this paper the psychological characteristics naming neuroticism, optimism, health attitude, future expectation and perception of family environment of mothers were analyzed and reported. Neuroticism of mother was correlated with her optimism, health attitude, future expectation and perception of family environment.

Results revealed that mother's neuroticism has very significant and negative correlation with her optimism, health attitude, future expectation and perception of family environment. It was significant in both of the cases whether they were chronically ill children mother or healthy children mother. This study again shows that mother's neuroticism correlated negatively and significantly with efficacy behaviors of children, whether optimism, health attitude, future expectation and perception of family relation and support correlated significantly and positively with behavioral efficacy.

This study clearly emphasizes that neurotic tendencies affect positivity of thinking. A neurotic mother can't keep herself psychologically well. Therefore, if she controls her neuroticism then only can achieve more psychological well-being. Neuroticism not only affects the well being of mother but its crude effect spreads to her child. Whether positive characteristics of mother like optimism, future hope, progressive health attitude and supportive family environment enhances efficacy behaviors of children but neurotic tendency of mother decreases it.

Introduction

Mother is a key person in the life of her child. Children's total development is dependent on their mothers. Mother exerts immense influence in the development of the child. Influence of mother on child development commences from not only after the birth but before the birth. Prolonged maternal stress and anxiety during pregnancy have been linked with a number of infant problems as hyperactivity restlessness, sleeping problems etc. Studies on temperament also show relation between maternal temperament and child temperament (Chess & Thomas, 1986). Mothers who rate themselves as high on positive emotionality also tend to rate their babies as having high positive affect (Goldsmith, Losoya, Bradshaw & Campus 1994). Psychologists agree on this fact that there must be a bi-directional relation between maternal personality and child temperament. A mother's personality can influence both her perception of child and her behavior towards her child. Thus mother's attitudes, anxieties, expectations, cognitions, parenting, psychological characteristics all together determine development and socialization of her child.

Neuroticism as a broad dimension of personality characterized by a tendency to experience chronic negative emotions and to display related behavioral and cognitive characteristics (Costa & McCrae, 1980, McCrae & Costa, 1984). Highly neurotic individuals have generally negative views of themselves and the world regardless of the objective reality. Dimensions like fearfulness, irritability, low self esteem, social anxiety, poor inhibition of impulses and helplessness are included in the trait of neuroticism. It is found that neuroticism is quite stable (McCrae & Costa,

1984). Evidences also show that it is heritable (Peterson et al, 1988). This finding has implication in case of mother. If mother is neurotic then her neuroticism will affect her child behavior more negatively.

Optimism is a positive characteristics and it is a belief that good things will happen. Scheir and Carver (1992) derive this trait as a stable generalized expectation that desired and favorable happening will take place. So it can be suggested that optimistic mother will exert positive influence on her child. An inverse prospective association found between optimism and postpartum depression with "expectant mothers. In a study it was found very significantly that mothers who have an optimistic view of their mentally-ill child's capabilities can make a big difference, Optimism is found to be related with coping, well-being, and symptom reporting behavior. A number of studies very efficiently show that optimism of mother is very much related with their own health as well, as the health of their child. Mother's optimism will be more important if her child is chronically ill because it was found that when mothers labeled their children in terms such as "incompetent" or unpredictable the children with illness were more likely to show themselves that way. Above cited literature given on optimism highlight a significant need to investigate optimism in mothers in relation to coping and efficacy behaviors of their children. It was therefore thought pertinent to explore the relationship between mother's optimism and symptom reporting behavior of their children

Mother's health attitude has some direct influence on children's preventive health behaviors because they usu-

ally function via their influence on parental behavior rather than direct communication to the child. (Dielman, et al., 1982). There is also a relation between parent's own health behavior and children's later preventive and illness related health recourse utilization, when they are mature enough to make their own health decisions.

Mother's future expectation is also very important because it influences the process of socialization and the future orientation of the child. Mother's expectations from her child affects action and behaviors of child and generally expectation give motivation and direction to child behavior. Mother's realistic expectations (not demanding too little or too much from the child) also improve the development of achievement motivation (Heckhausen, 1980).

Mother's perception of family relations and support is one more important variable. If mother perceives her family relations and support in a positive manner then it will affect her mental state positively. This will further influence her behaviors towards her child. In a study (Dunst et al., 1986) it was found that parents of children with various impairments, who were satisfied with their support networks reported fewer physical and emotional problems.

On the basis of literature review, three behaviors of children naming educational behavior, social relationship and future expectation were jointly taken as efficacy behavior.

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between psychological characteristics of mothers and efficacy behaviors of children. The relationship among psychological characteristic of mothers was also explored.

Method

Sample

The sample comprised of three hundred persons. There were two groups of children between the ages of 7 and 13 years and their mothers. Group I consisted of 75 chronically ill children and their mothers and group II consisted of 75 normal healthy children and their mothers. Group II served as a control Group. In group I children who were suffering from some type chronic illnesses like TB, epilepsy, kidney trouble, rheumatic heart disease, congenital heart disease, sickle cell anemia, and asthma were included. In both groups children from different socioeconomic classes - low socioeconomic, middle socioeconomic and high socioeconomic classes were interviewed.

Instruments – The psychological characteristics of mothers were assessed by following instruments

NIEI for Neuroticism :

Neuroticism and Introversion, Extroversion Inventory (NIEI) This inventory developed by Muhar, Bhatia, and Kapoor (1992) was used for measuring neurotic tendencies in mothers. The inventory covering a total of 50 items is divided into two parts. Part I measures neuroticism, and Part II measures extraversion. Responses are taken on a 3-point scale (Yes/No/Indifferent). The inventory has a test-retest reliability of 0.93 for the N Scale and 0.92 for the IE Scale. The validity coefficient against Eysenck's MPI is 0.94.

LOT for optimism of mother

LOT is a measure of optimism developed by Scheier & Carver (1985) The LOT consisted of 13 items out of these, nine items are related with dispositional optimism and four are filler items. Five items are phrased in a positive

way (item number 1,4,5,11&13) .(e.g. "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best") and four are phrased negatively (item number 3,8,9,12) (e.g. "If something can go wrong for me, it will"). Filler items are (2,6,7 & 10) like, "I like to be with my friends". Respondents were asked to answer each item by indicating the extent of their agreement on a 5 point Likert type scale, ranging from 'Strongly agree' (5) to "strongly disagree" (1) Negatively phrased items were scored in a reversed manner. Thus the answer "strongly agree" was awarded a score of '1' and "strongly disagree" was awarded a score of "5" The total sum of the scores obtained on the 5-point scale gives the optimism score of the respondent. Scores of the filler items were not taken in the total sum of the score of dispositional optimism. Scores ranged between 9 to 45 on this scale and high score was a symbol of optimism.

Health attitude belief questionnaire

This questionnaire developed by (Agarwal, A., 1993, 1995) was used for gathering information about mother's health attitudes and beliefs. The questionnaire has 44 items and three categories of answers. The inventory has two types of items. One is related to value about health and another is related to belief. An example of belief item is "Children do have Infectious diseases like measles, tetanus, etc. Their prevention..." The three alternative answers could be (a) is not possible (b) is possible to some extent and (c) is possible to a large extent. A corresponding value item was 1⁴!! Young children prevention of infectious diseases like measles and tetanus.", The three possible answers were : (a) is useless, (b) is useful, and (c) is very essential. These were awarded scores of 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Score on each belief item is multiplied by the score on its corresponding value item. The sum of these products gives the score on attitude scale. In order to minimize the tendency to respond without thinking some of the items were reversed (Item No: 2, 20, 27, 34, 41 and 44 were reversed). So that the answer, 'not true' was awarded a score of '3' and 'completely true', a score of 1, similarly on evaluation items answer of 'useless' was awarded a score of '3' and 'very useful' was awarded a score of '1', Although generally one belief item is paired with one item concerning the evaluation of that belief object, but four items are exceptional. Item NO. 26, 36, 33 and 43 are belief related items but each of these has two corresponding evaluation items, which appear adjacent to it. For example item No. 26 is a belief item but It has two corresponding evaluation items namely nos. 25 and 27. Similarly item no. 33 is paired with both items nos. 32 and 34 and item no. 36 is paired with item no. 35 and 37 and item no. 43 is paired with item nos. 42 and 44. Thus there are twenty four products.

Test retest reliability of this measure is very high $r=0.74$, after fifteen days. Convergent validity of this scale is also found to be significant.

Future expectation and perception of family relation & support was assessed by Interview schedule.

Interview Schedule

A structured interview schedule was developed by the investigator to assess mother's cognitions about their children in different areas like illness status (in chronically ill group only), health habits, parental future expectations, family relation and support, accident control and safety behavior and, parenting style which includes granting autonomy, use of reason and use of reward/punishment. In this schedule all questions were predecided and fixed for

both chronically ill and healthy groups. Answers were taken on this interview schedule in the form of free responses by the respondents. All responses were rated on 5 points scale ranging from 1 to 5 by the investigator.

Efficacy behavior of children was assessed by another interview schedule:

An interview schedule was developed by the investigator to assess children’s efficacy behaviors. Self efficacy expectancies are peoples’ expectations of being either able or unable to execute desired behavior successfully. The interview schedule covered questions or illness, health habit academic behavior social relation, future expectation and safety and family environment as perceived by the child. Efficacy core was calculated by summation the scores obtained in the areas of academic behavior, social relation and future expectation. All items were rated on 5 point scale.

Procedure

Many pediatricians and pediatric surgeons of the city were contacted and subjects were selected from their outpatient clinics so as to collect data on chronically ill children and their mothers. These children and their mothers were interrogated individually and relevant information was obtained using different instruments. Healthy children and their mothers were contacted in their homes.

Results

Correlations between mother’s psychological characteristics and children’s efficacy was computed and shown in table 1. Table 1 show that mother’s neuroticism is significantly and negatively correlated with efficacy behaviors of children. Mother’s optimism, health attitude, future expectation and perception of family relation and support correlated very significantly and positively with efficacy behaviors of children.

Table 1 Correlation between mother’s psychological characteristics and efficacy behaviors of children.

Mother’s psychological characteristics

	Neuroticism	optimism	Health altitude	Future expectation	Perception of family relation & support
Children’s efficacy behavior	-.16*	.19*	.39**	.63**	.39**

*P< .05; **p<.01

Correlations among psychological characteristics of mothers were also carried out. Five psychological characteristics naming neuroticism, optimism, health attitude, future expectation and perception of family relations and support were taken. Correlations are depicted in Table 2. Table 2 shows that mother’s neuroticism is significantly and negatively correlated with other four characteristics. It was found in both group i.e. chronically ill and healthy.

Table 2 Correlation of mother’s neuroticism with other psychological characteristics

Neuroticism of mother	Optimism	Health altitude	Future expectation	Perception of family relation & support

Chronically ill children group	-.46**	-.25**	-.25**	-.24**
Healthy children group	-.37**	-.29**	-.21**	-.22**

** p<.01

Discussion

Finding of this study very prominently signifies that if mother has neurotic tendency than she is found to be less optimistic, lesser progressive in attitude towards health, has fewer future hopes and perceives her family relation and support in negative manner. Other studies in other cultures also reported an inverse relationship between neuroticism and optimism (Anderson 1996). Mother’s neuroticism not only affects her own health and behavior but it also influenced her behavior towards her child. High neurotic mother does not expect more from her child’s future and also gives parenting style that is less positive. Studies report that mother’s negative expectations can also promote pessimism in her child.

Mother’s neuroticism negatively affects efficacy of behaviors of children, thus efficacy of behaviors will be positively influenced by mother’s optimism. Neuroticism put hindrance in behavioral efficacy but optimism appears as a buffers. Another thing, if mother has progressive attitude towards health then she will take her child’s illness and health problems in controllable manner. So, optimistic outlook along with progressive health attitude of mother will enhance efficacy behaviors of their children. Children will enhance their performance in educational sphere, social circles and both will further lead to greater future hopes. If mothers have more expectations about their children then their children also will perceive him as self competent, self reliant and will try to achieve more in domains of efficacy. Satisfactory family relations and supportive environment also facilitate mother to maintain their own health which will further influence health of their children. Such healthy children also will try to do better in their educational field , social area and future expectations domain. He will be benefited by mother’ perception of satisfactory family relations and support and he also will perceive his family environment in a more positive manner.

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