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Parenting Attitude, Parental Stress, and Anxiety in Mothers: A Correlational Study

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Abstract: ***Mothers handle everyday discipline while also carrying the strain and worry of the parenting role, yet these experiences are often studied separately. This study examined the relationships between parenting attitude, parental stress, and anxiety among mothers. A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was used with a convenience sample of 59 mothers, who completed a 30-item questionnaire rated on a five-point Likert scale. Parenting attitude was assessed through three discipline dimensions based on the Parenting Scale (laxness, over-reactivity, and verbosity), and parental stress and anxiety were each assessed with ten statements developed for the study. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, and Pearson and Spearman correlations. Mean scores were 3.30 (SD = 0.54) for parenting attitude, 3.06 (SD = 0.89) for parental stress, and 3.16 (SD = 0.72) for anxiety. Parenting attitude correlated positively with parental stress (r = .52, p < .001) and anxiety (r = .44, p < .001), and parental stress correlated with anxiety (r = .51, p < .001). Over-reactivity and verbosity were more closely related to stress than laxness was. Internal consistency was high for the stress (α = .91) and anxiety (α = .88) scales. The findings suggest that discipline difficulties, stress, and worry tend to occur together in mothers, although the design does not permit causal conclusions. Support programmes for mothers may benefit from addressing stress and worry alongside parenting skills.***

Keywords: Parenting attitude, parental stress, anxiety, mothers, correlation

1. Introduction

Parenting is made up of many small, everyday decisions: how to guide a child, when to set limits, how to offer comfort, and how to respond when the child is struggling. These decisions are rarely made in calm conditions. A mother may be managing her job, household work, school communication, and concerns about her child's health or future at the same time. Parenting behaviour is therefore not simply a matter of intention; it is shaped by the characteristics of the parent and the child and by the wider social context in which the family lives (Belsky, 1984).

This study brings together three closely related areas. Parenting attitude is studied here through three kinds of discipline response identified in the Parenting Scale: laxness, or difficulty following through with rules and consequences; over-reactivity, or anger and unusually strong reactions; and verbosity, or long and repeated verbal responses (Arnold et al., 1993). Parental stress refers to the pressure and tiredness that come with the parenting role (Deater-Deckard, 1998). Anxiety refers to worry, tension, and difficulty relaxing in relation to the child and to a mother's responsibilities. Some worry is a natural part of caring for a child, and a high questionnaire score is not the same as an anxiety disorder, which requires a detailed clinical assessment (Creswell et al., 2020).

When a mother is tired or worried, keeping rules consistent and staying calm can become harder, and a child's ongoing difficulties can in turn add to her stress and worry. Studying the three variables together can therefore give a clearer picture of how mothers' experiences are connected.

2. Literature Survey

The Parenting Scale was developed by Arnold et al. (1993) to assess how parents discipline their children in common situations, and their work identified laxness, over-reactivity, and verbosity as three factors in dysfunctional discipline. Later studies showed that the factor structure can vary across groups; Reitman et al. (2001), for example, found two factors rather than three in a Head Start sample of low-income parents. This suggests that a short adapted version cannot be assumed to function exactly like the original tool. Parental stress has been measured with parenting-specific tools such as the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1995) and the Parental Stress Scale, which covers both the strains and the rewards of parenthood (Berry & Jones, 1995). Stress can make everyday tasks feel harder and can reduce a parent's patience and emotional energy. Pinderhughes et al. (2000) found that parental stress, together with parents' beliefs and emotional reactions, was related to their discipline responses, and a longitudinal study by Borre and Kliewer (2014) linked parental strain and mental health problems to later parenting practices.

Emotional states also appear to play a part in discipline. Lorber (2012) found that the emotion regulation strategies used by mothers were associated with over-reactive and lax discipline. Research on anxious mothers shows that self-reported anxiety and observed parenting are related but not identical (Drake & Ginsburg, 2011), and the direction of influence may run both ways, since a child's anxiety can itself draw more controlling behaviour from the mother (Eley et al., 2015). A systematic review by Fang et al. (2024) found that parenting stress is associated with a wide range of

parent, child, and situational factors, including the parent's own mental health.

The study is guided by a transactional view, in which a mother's stress may shape her responses to her child and difficult interactions may add to her stress, and by the stress and coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which holds that stress depends partly on how a person appraises a demand and the resources available to meet it. Most of the evidence reviewed comes from Western samples, and fewer studies have examined these three variables together among Indian mothers.

3. Problem Definition

Mothers often deal with the strain and worry of parenting while also handling everyday discipline and communication with their children. Theory suggests that these experiences are linked, but evidence on how they relate in Indian mothers is limited. The present study therefore asked whether there is a significant relationship between parenting attitude, parental stress, and anxiety among mothers. Its objectives were (a) to describe the scores of the sample on each study variable; (b) to examine the relationships between parenting attitude and parental stress, parenting attitude and anxiety, and parental stress and anxiety; (c) to explore how laxness, over-reactivity, and verbosity relate to stress and anxiety; and (d) to estimate the internal consistency of each item group.

The following null hypotheses were tested: H_{01}: There is no significant correlation between parenting attitude and parental stress among mothers. H_{02}: There is no significant correlation between parenting attitude and anxiety among mothers. H_{03}: There is no significant correlation between parental stress and anxiety among mothers.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was used. Each mother completed the questionnaire once, and the study involved no intervention or follow-up. Because the design is cross-sectional, the hypotheses concern only the presence of a relationship and not its direction.

4.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 59 mothers selected through convenience sampling. All participants answered every one of the 30 statements, so all 59 responses were analysed. Mothers' ages ranged from 24 to 65 years, with most aged between 25 and 44 years. Participants came from a range of occupations; many were teachers or worked in education, some were homemakers, and others worked in professional, technical, and other fields. Education and child details were collected in free-text form and could not be grouped reliably, so demographic variables were not used in the analysis. During data screening, two responses under the same name were found to have identical answers on all 30 items. Both were retained in the main analysis and a sensitivity analysis was carried out.

4.3 Tool

The questionnaire had a demographic section and 30 statements. Parenting attitude (items 1–10) comprised four laxness items, three over-reactivity items, and three verbosity items worded around the factors of the Parenting Scale (Arnold et al., 1993); it is not the full standardised scale. Parental stress (items 11–20) and anxiety (items 21–30) were each measured with ten statements developed for this study. Each statement was rated on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). All statements are worded towards greater difficulty or concern, so no item was reverse scored. Scale and dimension scores were computed as the mean of their items, giving a common range of 1 to 5. As no norms exist for this questionnaire, scores were not classified into severity levels.

4.4 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire was shared with mothers along with a short note explaining the purpose of the study. Informed consent was obtained before participation, which was voluntary. No names are reported, results are presented only as group data, and access to the raw data was limited to the researcher and the guide. Responses were checked for missing values and for minor entry differences, such as extra spaces or spelling variations in the neutral option, before being converted to numerical scores.

4.5 Data Analysis

Means, standard deviations, minimum, and maximum scores were computed for each scale. Internal consistency was estimated using Cronbach's alpha. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to test the hypotheses and to explore the parenting dimensions, with two-tailed tests at the .05 level. Because the sample was small and the responses ordinal, Spearman's rank correlation was calculated as an additional check.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

The mean score was 3.30 (SD = 0.54) for parenting attitude, 3.06 (SD = 0.89) for parental stress, and 3.16 (SD = 0.72) for anxiety, all close to the midpoint of the scale (Table 1). Among the parenting dimensions, over-reactivity had the highest mean (M = 3.66), while laxness (M = 3.16) and verbosity (M = 3.13) were similar (Figure 1). Mothers therefore agreed most with statements about anger and losing patience; this is a comparison of averages and was not tested statistically. Parental stress showed the widest spread of scores (SD = 0.89).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and internal consistency (N = 59)

Scale	Items	M	SD	Range	α
Laxness	4	3.16	0.71	1.50–4.75	0.664
Over-reactivity	3	3.66	0.75	2.00–5.00	0.711
Verbosity	3	3.13	0.8	1.67–4.67	0.616
Parenting attitude	10	3.3	0.54	2.20–4.70	0.725
Parental stress	10	3.06	0.89	1.10–4.80	0.907
Anxiety	10	3.16	0.72	2.00–4.90	0.877

Note. Scores are mean item scores (possible range 1–5).

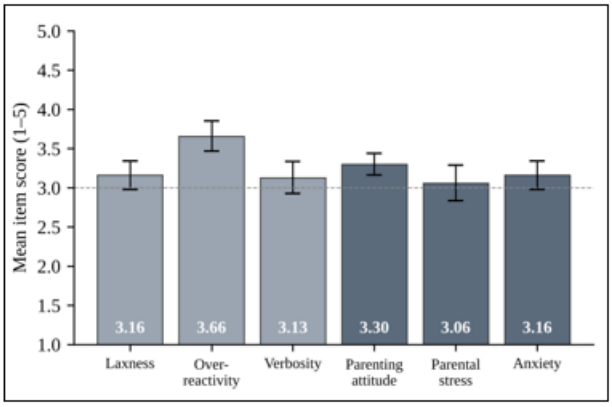


Figure 1: Mean scores of the study variables with 95% confidence intervals (N = 59)

Cronbach's alpha was high for the parental stress (α = .907) and anxiety (α = .877) scales and acceptable for the full parenting attitude scale (α = .725). The parenting dimensions had lower values, ranging from .616 for verbosity to .711 for over-reactivity, partly because each has only three or four items. A high alpha shows that the items hang together well but does not show that they capture every aspect of stress or anxiety.

5.2 Correlations Among the Main Variables

All three main variables were positively and significantly correlated (Table 2). The strongest relationship was between parenting attitude and parental stress ($r = .516$, $p < .001$), followed by parental stress and anxiety ($r = .507$, $p < .001$) and parenting attitude and anxiety ($r = .437$, $p < .001$). All three null hypotheses (H_{01}, H_{02}, H_{03}) were therefore rejected. Each correlation was moderate in strength. Spearman's rank correlations showed the same pattern ($r_s \approx .50$, .47, and .54 respectively), indicating that the results hold with a non-parametric method.

Table 2: Pearson and Spearman correlations (N = 59)

Relationship	r	p	r_s
Parenting attitude – Parental stress	0.516	< .001	0.5
Parenting attitude – Anxiety	0.437	< .001	0.47
Parental stress – Anxiety	0.507	< .001	0.54
Laxness – Parental stress	0.214	0.104	–
Laxness – Anxiety	0.29	0.026	–
Over-reactivity – Parental stress	0.464	< .001	–
Over-reactivity – Anxiety	0.304	0.019	–
Verbosity – Parental stress	0.472	< .001	–
Verbosity – Anxiety	0.354	0.006	–

Note. r = Pearson correlation; r_s = Spearman rank correlation, reported for the main relationships. Two-tailed tests.

5.3 Correlations for the Parenting Dimensions

Over-reactivity was positively correlated with parental stress ($r = .464$, $p < .001$) and anxiety ($r = .304$, $p = .019$), and verbosity showed a similar pattern ($r = .472$, $p < .001$ with stress; $r = .354$, $p = .006$ with anxiety). Laxness showed a small, non-significant correlation with parental stress ($r = .214$, $p = .104$) and a small but significant correlation with anxiety ($r = .290$, $p = .026$). As several correlations were tested, these dimension-level results are exploratory; the clearest pattern is that over-reactivity and verbosity were more closely related to stress than laxness was (Figure 2).

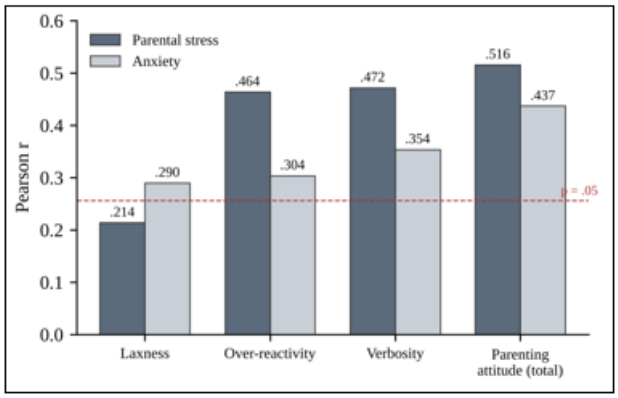


Figure 2: Correlations of parenting attitude and its dimensions with parental stress and anxiety (N = 59). The dashed line marks the critical r for p = .05.

5.4 Item-Level Results

Among the parenting attitude items, mothers agreed most with reacting more strongly than intended when the child misbehaves (item 6, M = 3.75; 44 of 59 agreed or strongly agreed) and losing patience when the child repeats a mistake (item 7, M = 3.75). They agreed least with continuing to talk after the child has understood (item 10, M = 2.56). Among the stress items, the highest means were for feeling stressed by maternal responsibilities (item 11, M = 3.27) and feeling under pressure when the child has problems at school (item 14, M = 3.27). Among the anxiety items, the highest agreement was for feeling nervous when the child faces difficulties (item 29, M = 3.51), and the lowest was for worrying that the child may not do well in the future (item 28, M = 2.29), with which 42 mothers disagreed.

5.5 Sensitivity Analysis

After removing one of the two identical responses (N = 58), the correlations were $r = .475$ for parenting attitude and stress, $r = .456$ for parenting attitude and anxiety, and $r = .532$ for stress and anxiety (all $p < .001$). All three relationships remained positive and significant, showing that the main conclusions did not depend on retaining both responses.

5.6 Discussion

The positive relationship between parenting attitude and parental stress fits the view that difficult parenting moments and feelings of pressure tend to go together. A mother who feels tired or overwhelmed may have less energy to keep

rules consistent or to stay calm, while repeated difficult interactions with a child may add to her stress, in line with transactional models and with findings that stress is related to discipline responses (Pinderhughes et al., 2000; Borre & Kliewer, 2014). The cross-sectional design cannot show which of these explanations is correct, or whether both variables are linked to factors such as work pressure, family support, or the child's behaviour, which were not measured. The link between parenting attitude and anxiety is consistent with research connecting mothers' emotional experiences to their discipline practices (Lorber, 2012). However, parenting and anxiety can both be shaped by family circumstances and the child's needs (Fang et al., 2024), and the results do not show that anxiety leads to a particular parenting style or that any participant had an anxiety disorder. The moderate correlation between stress and anxiety is understandable, since both involve strain related to family responsibilities; the stress items focus on overload and lack of time, whereas the anxiety items focus on nervousness and worry that is hard to stop. Similar wording and a shared response format may have strengthened this correlation somewhat.

At the dimension level, over-reactivity may reflect moments when a mother's emotional energy is low, and verbosity may reflect repeated attempts to manage the child's behaviour; these explanations were not tested directly. The non-significant link between laxness and stress does not mean that no relationship exists: the true effect may be small, the sample may have been too small to detect it, or the four items may not have captured laxness fully. The high endorsement of over-reactive responses also suggests that emotion regulation in difficult moments may be a useful focus for parent support.

These findings have practical value for counsellors working with families. Support programmes for mothers could address stress and worry together with parenting skills, for example by combining discipline strategies with stress management and emotion regulation, after first understanding the specific needs and situations of the families involved. The findings should not be used to blame mothers or to treat parenting as a fixed personal quality.

The study has several limitations. The sample was small and selected by convenience, the data were self-reported and collected at one point in time, and the questionnaire was developed for this study rather than standardised. Some demographic details were inconsistent, and one response may have been a duplicate. The results therefore cannot be generalised to all mothers or used to classify anyone clinically.

6. Conclusion

This study examined parenting attitude, parental stress, and anxiety among 59 mothers. All three variables were positively and moderately correlated, and all three null hypotheses were rejected: mothers who reported more discipline difficulties also tended to report more stress and more worry. Parenting attitude was more strongly related to stress than to anxiety, and over-reactivity and verbosity were more closely linked with stress than laxness was. The stress and anxiety scales showed high internal consistency in this sample. The study does not conclude that parenting attitude causes stress or anxiety, or that any participant had a clinical condition; rather, it highlights the value of addressing mothers' strain and worry alongside parenting skills.

7. Future Scope

Future research should use standardised tools for parenting practices, parental stress, and anxiety, or carefully validate study-specific questionnaires, with larger samples selected through clearly described methods. Fixed answer options for demographic questions and checks for duplicate entries and unlikely values would improve data quality and allow comparisons across age, occupation, and family structure. Longitudinal and multi-informant designs could show how stress and parenting practices influence each other over time, and studies could include social support, work demands, child behaviour, and family resources to understand the context in which mothers parent.

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