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

Raseefa R

M.Sc. Counselling Psychology, Department of Psychology PG Studies, Centre for Distance and Online Education, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India
USN: 241MSCD00638 | Email: *raseefaziz[at]gmail.com*

Abstract: ***Mothers often manage everyday discipline while also carrying the strain and worry that come with raising a child, yet these experiences are rarely studied together in Indian samples. This study examined the relationship between parenting attitude, parental stress, and anxiety in mothers. A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was used with 59 mothers selected through convenience sampling. Participants completed a 30-item questionnaire rated on a five-point Likert scale, in which parenting attitude was assessed through three dimensions (laxness, over-reactivity, and verbosity), and parental stress and anxiety were each assessed with ten study-developed items. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, and Pearson's correlation, with Spearman's rank correlation as an additional check. 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. Significant positive correlations were found between parenting attitude and parental stress (r = .52, p < .001), parenting attitude and anxiety (r = .44, p < .001), and parental stress and anxiety (r = .51, p < .001), and all three remained significant in a sensitivity analysis. Over-reactivity and verbosity were more strongly related to stress than laxness was. The findings suggest that difficulties in discipline, parenting strain, and worry tend to occur together, and that support for mothers could address emotional strain alongside parenting skills.***

Keywords: Parenting attitude, parental stress, anxiety, mothers, correlational study

1. Introduction

Parenting consists 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, communication with school, and concerns about her child's health or future at the same time. The way she responds to her child is therefore shaped not only by her intentions but also by the demands she faces and her own emotional state [3].

Research on discipline has described three broad patterns of ineffective responses: laxness, or difficulty following through with rules and consequences; over-reactivity, or anger and responses stronger than intended; and verbosity, or long and repeated verbal responses [2]. Parental stress refers to the pressure and tiredness that arise from the parenting role [1, 4], while anxiety refers to worry, tension, and difficulty relaxing in relation to the child and to a mother's responsibilities. Stress and anxiety are related but distinct, and a high questionnaire score on either does not indicate a clinical condition [6].

In many Indian families, mothers carry much of the day-to-day responsibility for children's routines, studies, and behaviour, often alongside paid work and household duties. Expectations around academic achievement and the child's future can add to this load. Understanding how discipline, strain, and worry are connected in such settings can help counsellors and family-support programmes respond to mothers' actual experiences rather than to assumptions drawn from other cultures.

When a mother is tired or worried, keeping rules consistent and staying calm may become harder; at the same time, a child's ongoing difficulties can add to her stress and worry [8]. Studying these three variables together therefore offers a clearer picture of how mothers' experiences are connected. The present study used a correlational design to examine whether parenting attitude, parental stress, and anxiety move together in a group of mothers.

2. Literature Survey

2.1 Parenting and Discipline Practices

Belsky's process model proposes that parenting is shaped by the characteristics of the parent, the characteristics of the child, and the wider social context [3]. This view cautions against treating a mother's parenting score as a fixed trait separate from her circumstances.

Arnold et al. [2] developed the Parenting Scale to assess discipline in common situations and identified laxness, over-reactivity, and verbosity as its three factors. Later work showed that the factor structure can differ across groups; Reitman et al. [15], for example, found two rather than three factors among low-income Head Start parents, indicating that a short or adapted version cannot be assumed to behave like the original tool.

Consistent rules help children understand what is expected of them, and laxness, giving in or not carrying out an announced consequence, may arise from tiredness, lack of time, uncertainty, or a wish to avoid conflict. Over-reactivity is a response that is stronger or more irritable than the parent intended, and good emotion regulation helps a parent notice the reaction, pause, and choose a more suitable response. Verbosity concerns how a parent talks to the child in a difficult moment: explaining a rule can help a child understand it, but repeating instructions or continuing to talk after the child has understood may reflect difficulty in keeping communication short and clear [2].

2.2 Parental Stress and Parenting Behaviour

Parental stress has been measured with the Parenting Stress Index [1] and the Parental Stress Scale, which covers both the strains and the rewards of parenting [4]. Deater-Deckard [8] noted that parenting stress and child adjustment influence each other in many ways.

Pinder Hughes et al. [14] found that parental stress, together with beliefs and emotional reactions, was related to how parents responded to misbehavior, and **Borre and Kliewer [5]** showed in a longitudinal study that parental strain and mental health problems were linked to later parenting practices.

Stress can make everyday tasks feel harder and can reduce a parent's attention, patience, and emotional energy. Measures of parenting stress have also been adapted for different cultures, which shows that any tool needs to be checked for reliability in the group in which it is used [4].

2.3 Anxiety and Parenting

Anxiety usually involves worry, tension, restlessness, and difficulty relaxing. A parent may worry about the child's studies, development, safety, or future, and some worry is a natural part of caring for a child; anxiety that is persistent and interferes with daily life, however, requires proper clinical assessment [6]. Anxiety may also affect how a parent handles uncertainty, and it has been linked to more checking, reassurance seeking, and control.

Emotional processes also appear to matter for discipline. **Lorber [13]** found that mothers' emotion regulation strategies were associated with over-reactive and lax discipline. Studies of maternal anxiety show that self-reported anxiety and observed parenting are related but not identical [9], and that the direction of influence can run from child to parent, as when a child's anxiety elicits more controlling maternal behaviour [10]. A systematic review further showed that parenting stress is associated with a wide range of parent, child, and situational factors, including the parent's own mental health [11].

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by a transactional view of parenting, in which a person's characteristics, behaviour, and environment influence one another over time; a mother's stress may shape how she responds to her child, and difficult interactions may in turn add to her stress. The stress and coping theory of **Lazarus and Folkman [12]** adds that stress depends partly on how a person appraises a demand and the resources available to meet it, so the same situation may feel very different depending on a mother's support, health, and time. Both frameworks support studying the three variables together without assuming a one-way cause.

2.5 Research Gap

Most of this evidence comes from Western samples, and fewer studies have examined parenting attitude, parental stress, and anxiety 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 from Indian mothers that examines all three together is limited. The present study therefore asked whether there is a significant relationship between parenting attitude, parental stress, and anxiety among mothers.

The objectives were:

a) To describe the scores 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 null hypotheses were:

- **H01:** There is no significant correlation between parenting attitude and parental stress.
- **H02:** There is no significant correlation between parenting attitude and anxiety.
- **H03:** 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; no intervention or follow-up was involved. As the design is cross-sectional, the hypotheses concern only the presence of relationships, not their causal direction.

4.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 59 mothers selected through convenience sampling. All participants answered all 30 statements, so every response was included in the analysis. Mothers were aged 24 to 65 years, with most between 25 and 44 years. Many worked in teaching or education, some were homemakers, and others worked in professional, technical, and other fields. Because education and child details were collected as free text, they could not be grouped reliably and were not used in the analysis.

4.3 Tool

The questionnaire had a demographic section and 30 statements rated on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Parenting attitude (items 1–10) was assessed through:

- Laxness (items 1–4)
- Over-reactivity (items 5–7)
- Verbosity (items 8–10)

with wording based on the dimensions of the Parenting Scale [2]; 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. All items are worded in the direction of greater difficulty or concern, so no item was reverse scored, and higher scores indicate stronger agreement.

4.4 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire was shared with mothers together with a short note explaining the purpose of the study. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were told that taking part 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. The information was used only for academic purposes.

4.5 Data Analysis

Responses were coded from 1 to 5 after correcting minor spelling and spacing differences in the neutral option. Scale and dimension scores were computed as the mean of their items, so that all scores range from 1 to 5. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha [7] were calculated. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used. to test the hypotheses, with two-tailed tests at the .05 level. Because the sample is small and the data are ordinal, Spearman's rank correlation was computed as an additional check. One name appeared twice with identical answers on all 30 items; both responses were retained in the main analysis, and a sensitivity analysis was conducted after removing one of them. No cut-off scores were applied.

4.6 Assumptions and Delimitations

The study assumes that participants answered honestly. It is delimited to mothers' self-reports collected at a single point in time with study-specific items, and it did not include reports from children, other family members, or direct observation of parent-child interaction. Social desirability and the small sample may therefore have influenced the findings.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

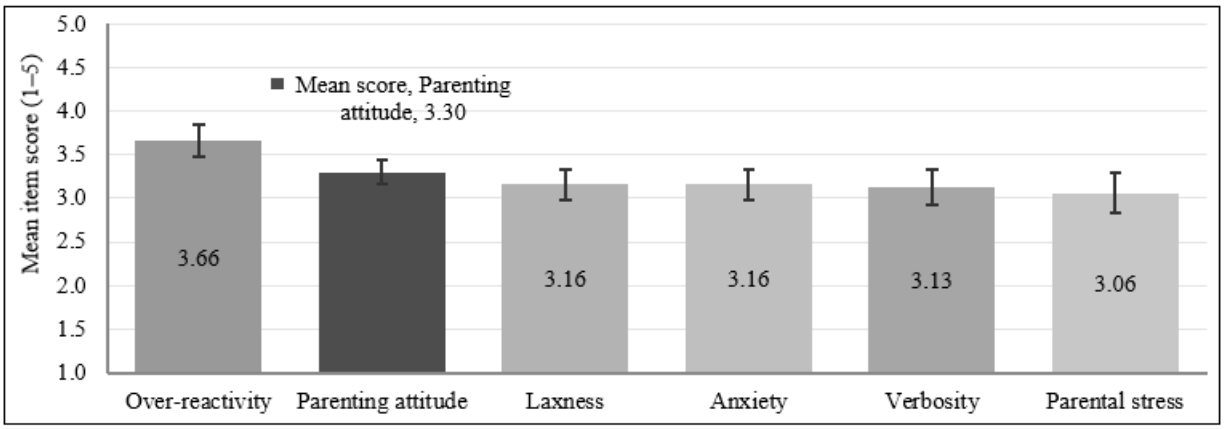
The mean score was **3.30 (SD = 0.54)** for parenting attitude, **3.06 (SD = 0.89)** for parental stress, and **3.16 (SD = 0.72)** for anxiety (Table 1). Among the parenting dimensions, **over-reactivity had the highest mean (M = 3.66)**, followed by **laxness (M = 3.16)** and **verbosity (M = 3.13)** (Figure 1). This comparison of means was not tested statistically.

At the item level, mothers agreed most with reacting more strongly than intended and losing patience when the child repeats a mistake (both **M = 3.75**), and least with continuing to talk after the child has understood (**M = 2.56**). Among the anxiety items, agreement was highest for feeling nervous when the child faces difficulties (**M = 3.51**) and lowest for worrying that the child may not do well in the future (**M = 2.29**).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 59)

Variable	Items	M	SD	Min	Max
Laxness	4	3.16	0.71	1.5	4.75
Over-reactivity	3	3.66	0.75	2	5
Verbosity	3	3.13	0.8	1.67	4.67
Parenting attitude	10	3.3	0.54	2.2	4.7
Parental stress	10	3.06	0.89	1.1	4.8
Anxiety	10	3.16	0.72	2	4.9

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



Responses to individual items show that the same mean can arise from different response patterns (Table 5). Over-reactivity items drew the most agreement, with **44 of 59 mothers agreeing that they sometimes react more strongly than intended**. In contrast, only **9 mothers agreed that they worry their child may not do well in the future**, which suggests that worry in this sample centred on immediate difficulties rather than long-term outcomes.

Table 5: Most and Least-Endorsed Items by Scale (N = 59)

Item	M	SD	Agree/ Strongly Agree (n)
Parenting attitude: highest			
React more strongly than intended	3.75	0.99	44
Lose patience at repeated mistakes	3.75	0.9	42
Parenting attitude: lowest			
Keep talking after child understands	2.56	1.05	14
Parental stress: highest			
Stressed by responsibilities as a mother	3.27	1.31	32

Under pressure when child has school problems	3.27	1.1	33
Parental stress: lowest			
Difficult to relax due to parenting	2.9	1.23	23
Anxiety: highest			
Nervous when child faces difficulties	3.51	1.04	38
Anxiety: lowest			
Worry child may not do well in future	2.29	1.02	9

Note: Item wording abbreviated. Full item results are available in the dissertation appendix.

5.2 Reliability

Parental stress (**α = .907**) and anxiety (**α = .877**) showed high internal consistency, and the full parenting attitude scale was acceptable (**α = .725**) (Table 2).

The dimension alphas were lower, ranging from **.616 for verbosity** to **.711 for over-reactivity**, partly because each dimension has only three or four items. Dimension-level results should therefore be read with caution.

A high alpha shows that items hang together, but it does not establish that they cover every aspect of a construct.

Table 2: Internal Consistency (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	Items	α	Interpretation
Laxness	4	0.664	Questionable
Over-reactivity	3	0.711	Acceptable
Verbosity	3	0.616	Questionable
Parenting attitude	10	0.725	Acceptable
Parental stress	10	0.907	Excellent
Anxiety	10	0.877	Good

Note: Interpretation follows commonly used alpha guidelines.

5.3 Hypothesis Testing

Parenting attitude was positively correlated with parental stress (**r = .516, p < .001**) and with anxiety (**r = .437, p < .001**), and parental stress was positively correlated with anxiety (**r = .507, p < .001**) (Table 3).

Therefore:

- H01 was rejected.
- H02 was rejected.
- H03 was rejected.

All three relationships were statistically significant, indicating that higher parenting difficulties were associated with higher levels of parental stress and anxiety among mothers.

All three correlations were moderate in strength. Spearman's correlations showed the same pattern, and after removing one of the two identical responses (**N = 58**), all three correlations remained positive and significant (**r = .475, .456, and .532; all p < .001**), indicating that the main results did not depend on that response.

Table 3: Correlations among the Main Variables, with Spearman and Sensitivity Checks

Relationship	Pearson r (N = 59)	Spearman rs	Pearson r (N = 58)	Decision
H01: Parenting attitude – Parental stress	.516***	0.5	.475***	Rejected
H02: Parenting attitude – Anxiety	.437***	0.47	.456***	Rejected
H03: Parental stress – Anxiety	.507***	0.54	.532***	Rejected

Note. ***p < .001, two-tailed. N = 58 is the sensitivity analysis after removing one of two identical responses. Spearman values are approximate.

5.4 Parenting Dimensions

Over-reactivity and verbosity were moderately correlated with parental stress (**r = .464** and **.472**, both **p < .001**) and showed smaller significant correlations with anxiety (Table 4). Laxness had a small, non-significant correlation with stress (**r = .214, p = .104**) and a small significant correlation with anxiety (**r = .290, p = .026**). As several correlations were tested, these results are exploratory.

Table 4: Correlations of Parenting Dimensions with Stress and Anxiety (N = 59)

Dimension	Parental Stress r (p)	Anxiety r (p)
Laxness	.214 (.104)	.290 (.026)*
Over-reactivity	.464 (< .001)***	.304 (.019)*
Verbosity	.472 (< .001)***	.354 (.006)**

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, two-tailed. These analyses are exploratory.

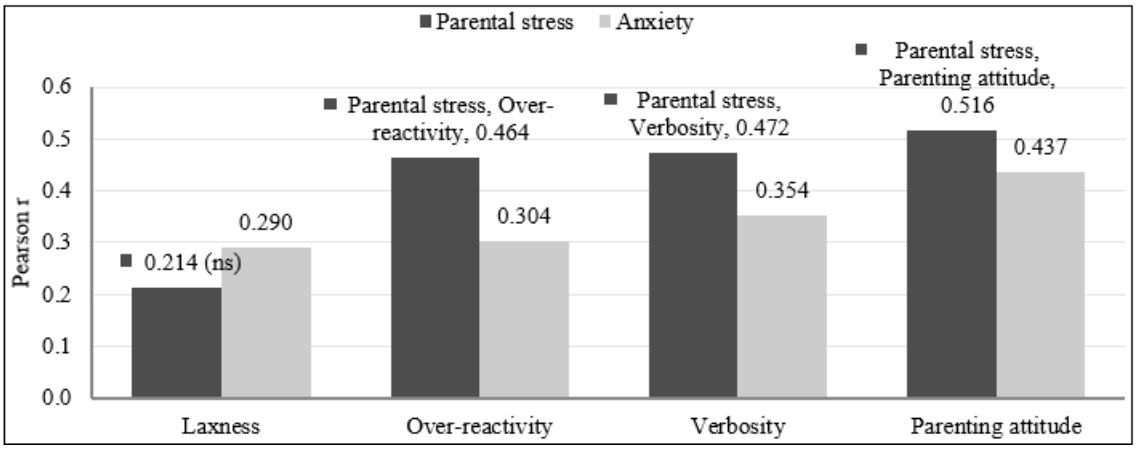


Figure 2: Correlations of parenting attitude and its dimensions with parental stress and anxiety (N = 59; ns = not significant)

5.5 Discussion

The positive relationship between parenting attitude and parental stress fits the idea that difficult discipline moments and feelings of pressure tend to occur together. A mother who feels tired or overwhelmed may have less energy to keep rules consistent or to stay calm, and repeated difficult interactions may in turn add to her stress [8, 14].

The link between parenting attitude and anxiety is consistent with research connecting parents' emotional experiences to their discipline practices [13], although child characteristics and family circumstances can shape both [10, 11]. The correlation between stress and anxiety is understandable, since both involve strain related to family responsibilities, although the stress items focus on overload and lack of time while 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 slightly.

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 well.

5.6 Implications

Counsellors working with mothers may find it useful to explore stress and worry alongside discipline concerns rather than treating parenting skills in isolation. Brief strategies for noticing and pausing before reacting may be relevant given the high endorsement of over-reactivity items, and keeping instructions short and clear may help where verbosity is reported.

Practically, the findings suggest that support programmes for mothers could address stress and worry alongside parenting skills, after first understanding the specific needs of the families involved. The findings should not be used to blame mothers or to treat parenting as a fixed personal quality.

5.7 Limitations

The study has several limitations. The sample was small and selected by convenience, the data were self-reported at one point in time, and the questionnaire was not a standardised tool. Some demographic details were inconsistent, and one response may have been a duplicate.

The results therefore cannot be generalised to all mothers, cannot establish cause and effect, and cannot be used to classify anyone clinically.

6. Conclusion

This study found significant, moderate, positive relationships between parenting attitude, parental stress, and anxiety among 59 mothers. Mothers who reported more difficulty in discipline also tended to report more parenting stress and more worry, and these results held in non-parametric and sensitivity checks.

Over-reactivity and verbosity were more closely related to stress than laxness was. The study does not show that parenting attitude causes stress or anxiety, or that any participant had a clinical condition.

7. Future Scope

Future studies should use standardised measures of parenting practices, parental stress, and anxiety, or develop and validate study-specific tools more carefully. Researchers should also recruit larger samples through clearly described methods.

Longitudinal designs could help clarify how parenting attitude, stress, and anxiety influence one another over time, while studies involving fathers, children, and multiple family members may provide a broader understanding of family dynamics.

Fixed answer options for demographic questions and checks for duplicate entries and unlikely values would improve data quality. Longitudinal and multi-informant designs could show how stress and parenting practices change over time, and studies could include social support, work demands, child behaviour, and family resources to better understand the context in which mothers parent.

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