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Parental self-confidence, parenting styles, and corporal punishment in families of ADHD children in Iran

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Abstract

Objective: This study examines the relationship between parental self-confidence, warmth, and involvement, and corporal punishment in families of children with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Method: The diagnosis of ADHD was established through clinical interviews with the parents, children, and teachers, according to the criteria in DSM-IV-TR. This diagnosis was also established by having the parents complete the Conners' Parent Rating Scale, and the teachers complete the Conners' Teacher Rating Scale. Two groups of Iranian parents, one group with children who have ADHD ($N=130$) and a control group ($N=120$), completed questionnaires measuring parental self-confidence and parenting styles.

Results: Parents of children with ADHD were found to have lower self-confidence and less warmth and involvement with their children, and used corporal punishment significantly more than the parents of control children.

Conclusions: The study provides strong evidence that children with ADHD are at considerable risk of abuse by their parents. Rather than focusing only on the child's ADHD, treatment may also need to address the parents' functioning.

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Keywords: Parenting styles; ADHD; Iran; Corporal punishment; Conners' Rating Scales

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Introduction

Children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) typically show considerable problems with attention, activity level and impulsivity, and it is estimated that ADHD affects 3–7% of school-aged children (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). There is increasing evidence that ADHD is primarily a genetically-based and neurological disorder (e.g., Castellanos et al., 1994; Coolidge, Thede, & Young, 2000; Filipek et al., 1997; Giedd et al., 1994; Roth & Saykin, 2004; Sergeant, Geurts, Huijbregts, Scheres, & Oosterlaan, 2003), but this does not diminish the need for research concerning the family dynamics of children with this disorder. In addition, we would suggest that further research in this area is warranted because the parents of children with ADHD are an important source of external feedback for their children, and these children tend to have more delicate relationships with their parents.

Although studies suggest that there are frequent difficulties in the families of children with ADHD, parental dysfunction is not a main causal factor for ADHD (Conte, 1991). However, because of their biological and self-regulatory problems, children with ADHD often make family relationships challenging. For this reason, children with ADHD may create more family stress (Abidin, 1983) and the parents of these children may frequently misinterpret their child's behavior or intentions. These negative attitudes can affect the child's capacity to develop internal direction (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1998).

The present study was designed to increase understanding of the impact that parental self-confidence and parenting styles have upon families of children with ADHD compared to those without ADHD. It was hypothesized that parents of children with ADHD would have lower self-confidence, report less warmth and involvement in the parenting of their children and would be prone to greater use of corporal punishment. Gender differences in these measures were also explored.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 125 families that had a student attending public elementary schools in Tehran, Iran. There were 65 students diagnosed with ADHD, and 60 students were chosen as a control group. The controls were matched with respect to demographic characteristics (see Table 1). Level of parental education was used as an indicator of socioeconomic status.

The mean age for children in the ADHD group was 9.3 ($SD = 1.4$), whereas the mean age for children in the non-ADHD group was 9.0 ($SD = 1.3$). Within the ADHD group, the mean age for boys was 9.3 years ($SD = 1.5$), and the mean age for girls was 9.4 years ($SD = 1.3$). In the non-ADHD group, the mean age for boys was 8.9 years ($SD = 1.4$), and the mean age for girls was 9.3 years ($SD = 1.5$). The mean age of parents in the ADHD group was 36.4 years ($SD = 6.7$), whereas the mean age for parents in the control group was 36.9 years ($SD = 5.3$). The average number of the siblings for the children in the ADHD group was 2.8 ($SD = 1.2$), compared to 2.4 ($SD = 1.1$) for the non-ADHD group. For children in the ADHD group, 19% had divorced parents and/or lived with just one parent, compared to 8.6% in the non-ADHD group. Twenty-five percent of the mothers in the ADHD group suggested that the child with ADHD was unwanted, compared to 2% of mothers in the control group.

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