



Adolescent's perceptions of parenting behaviours and its relationship to adolescent Generalized Anxiety Disorder symptoms

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between how adolescents perceived parenting behaviours and adolescent Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) symptom scores. The 1106 junior high and high school students (12–19 years old; 49.6% males and 50.4% females) completed questionnaires regarding their perception of parenting behaviours and self-rated symptoms of GAD. The findings of this study demonstrate that adolescent perceptions of parental alienation and rejection are strongly associated with adolescent GAD symptom scores. Additionally, mid-adolescence females perceive more parental alienation in relation to their GAD symptom scores than both early and mid-adolescent males. And early adolescent males perceive more parental rejection in relation to their GAD symptom scores than mid-adolescent males.

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Introduction

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) is a debilitating disorder (Mancuso, Townsend, & Mercante, 1993) which generally has an early and gradual onset that many times leads to a long and chronic course (Dugas, 2000; Hunt & Singh, 1991). Additionally sufferers of GAD place a strong burden on the primary care setting (Wittchen, 2002). It is suggested that GAD develops early during childhood and mid-adolescence (Comer & Kendall, 2004) leading some to hypothesize that GAD might be the basic anxiety from which other anxiety disorders later emerge (Borkovec, Newman, Pincus, & Lytle, 2002; Brown, Barlow, & Liebowitz, 1994). It is for these reasons that attention into child and adolescent GAD is growing.

The core symptom of GAD is excessive, persistent and uncontrollable worry (Comer & Kendall, 2004; Rapee, 2001) and researchers such as Borkovec (1994) have noted that a major component of the worry of GAD sufferers centers on interpersonal difficulties (Borkovec, Alcaine, & Behar, 2004). In respect to adolescents it is suggested that a focus of GAD worry centers on social-evaluative concerns (Hudson & Rapee, 2004). Hence, research of factors involved in adolescent GAD symptoms also should be conducted into interpersonal factors involved in adolescent social-evaluative concerns.

Two interpersonal factors involved in adolescent social-evaluative concerns that have been related to adolescent GAD symptoms are adolescent perceptions of parental rejection and over-control behaviours (Rapee, 1997). A study by Muris and Merckelbach (1998) of (pre-)adolescents (8–12 years old) found significant relationships between the adolescents' perception of parental rejection and over-control behaviours and adolescent GAD symptoms.

In addition to the perception of parental rejection and control, the adolescent's perception of his attachment relationship to his parents should also receive attention in the study of GAD symptom development. Dugas, Buhr, and Ladouceur (2004) have suggested that adolescent perception of insecure attachment may contribute to the development of worry and other GAD symptoms. Similar suggestions have been made by Cassidy (1995). A study of attachment by Muris, Meesters, Merckelbach, and Huelsenbeck (2000) focused on (pre-)adolescent perceived attachment in relation to their worry patterns. In this study it was found that adolescents that perceived their attachment as being insecure worry more than adolescents that perceived their attachment as being secure. Additionally, it was found that perceived parental rejection was strongly associated with perceived insecure attachment and worry.

When this is all taken together it becomes clear that an adolescent's perception of his parents' behaviours, such as perceived parental rejection, perceived parental over-control and perceived insecure attachment are significantly related to adolescent GAD symptoms. Therefore, this study explores how adolescent perceptions of parental rejection, over-control behaviours and perceived attachment are related to adolescent GAD symptom scores, as well as the relative importance of these parental behaviours when related to one another.

In addition to this it is also explored whether the effects of these perceptions of parental behaviours affect adolescent age and gender groups differently in respect to adolescent GAD symptom scores. The reason for such exploring of potential age and gender differences is three-fold. First, in respect to gender differences, it has been found that females have a tendency to be more sensitive to interpersonal interactions than male adolescents (Hankin & Abramson, 2001).

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