

A Study of Anxiety in School Children as Related To Child-Rearing Attitude and Some Personality Traits of Parents

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Several studies have indicated that the attitudes of parents and their personality characteristics are important sources of strength or weakness in the development of the personality structure of the child (Ayer and Bernreuter, 1937; Radke, 1946; Shoben, 1949; Symonds, 1939). Researchers like Caputo (1961), Fisher et al (1959), Gerard and Siegel (1950), Horner (1960), Winder and Kantor (1958) have found that children brought up under strict parental discipline tend to be more worried and anxious and to have more social and emotional problems. But, on the other hand, Myers (1935) discovered that adjustment in high school children was totally unrelated to strictness of home discipline. Similarly, the researches comparing the parents of mentally ill sons with those of normals on child-rearing attitudes and personality factors are contradictory and no clear pattern of pathogenic personality characteristics and parental attitudes emerges (Berger, 1959; Farahmand, 1961; Garmezny et al, 1958; Guertin, 1958; Heilbrun, 1960).

There have been very few studies in the Indian context, on the relationship of child-rearing attitude and personality characteristics of parents with the mental health of the child. Hassan, (1974) observed that authoritarianism in children was associated with the strict parental discipline. In another study, Hassan (1976) discovered that the neurotic children tended to come from a family where the father was a strict and the mother a lenient disciplinarian. Pain and Nandi (1974) compared parents of Schizophrenics with those of normals on child-rearing attitudes and found that parents of schizophrenics had more favourable attitude towards the strict discipline of the child.

The importance of a study of anxiety in relation to parental discipline can hardly be ignored in India particularly in view of the paucity of such researches in this country. Furthermore, the inconsistent results revealed by the non-Indian researches on the problem provide a justification for such a study.

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Hence, the present research was conducted to study anxiety in school children in relation to child-rearing attitude and some personality traits of parents.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives: The main objectives of the present research are the following :

(i) To compare fathers of 'high' anxious children with those of 'low' anxious children on child-rearing attitude and some personality factors such as anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

(ii) To compare mothers of 'high' anxious children with those of 'low' anxious children on child-rearing attitude and some personality factors such as anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

(iii) To compare between fathers and mothers of 'high' anxious children on child-rearing attitude and such personality factors as anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

(iv) To compare between fathers and mothers of 'low' anxious children on child-rearing attitude and such personality factors as anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

(v) To study the relationship of child-rearing attitude with such personality factors as anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

Sample: The sample for this study consists of 160 Hindu school children selected on a random basis from Classes X and XI of different schools located at Ranchi. The selected sample was given Sinha's Anxiety Scale (Sinha, 1968) which consisted of 100 items, each item

having two response alternatives (Yes/No). A score of one was given for each 'Yes' responses. Thus the range of the score on this scale for each individual case was from 0 to 100. From the total pool of the subjects, 40 'high' scorers and 40 'low' scorers were selected to represent respectively 'high' and 'low' anxious groups. Subjects obtaining above Q3 were placed under 'high' anxious group and those obtaining below Q1 were placed under 'low' anxious group. Parents of the children of these two extreme groups were selected for further study and given scales of child-rearing attitude, anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

Tools: The following tools were administered on the sample selected for the study.

(i) Child-rearing Attitude Scale (Singh, 1975): It is a 15-item Likert type attitude scale. Response alternatives for positive statements were scored from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The scoring was reversed for the response alternatives to the negative statements. Higher scores on the Scale indicated favourable attitudes towards the strict discipline of the child.

(ii) Sinha's Anxiety Scale (Sinha, 1968).

(iii) A 15-item Likert type scale of authoritarianism (Singh, 1975): Response alternatives to positive items were weighted from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Weights for negative items were reversed. High scores indicated greater degree of authoritarianism.

(iv) Rigidity Scale (Singh, 1975): It is a 15-item Likert type scale. For positive statements, the response alternatives were weighted from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

Weights for response alternatives to negative items were reversed. High scores indicated greater degree of rigidity.

Analysis of Data: Mean scores of the parents of 'high' and 'low' anxious groups of children on the scales of child-rearing attitude, anxiety, authoritarianism, and rigidity were considered and the comparison was made between the comparable groups by using 't' tests. The results are given in Tables 1-5.

RESULTS

Table 1 compares fathers of 'high' anxious children with those of 'low' anxious children on child-rearing attitude and personality factors such as anxiety, authoritarianism, and rigidity.

TABLE-1

COMPARISON BETWEEN FATHERS OF 'HIGH' AND 'LOW' ANXIOUS CHILDREN

Groups	Child-rearing attitude	Anxiety	Authoritarianism.	Rigidity
Fathers of 'high' anxious children (N = 40)	M 56.55	44.38	54.13	55.30
	SD 12.12	8.61	9.65	11.14
Fathers of 'low' anxious children (N=40)	M 39.99	35.10	44.26	38.17
	SD 11.46	12.15	10.14	10.50
	't' 8.58**	5.13**	5.25**	9.25**

**Significant at .01 level

The following main points may be observed in this table.

(i) There exists a significant difference between the child-rearing attitudes of the fathers of 'high' and 'low' anxious children. Fathers of 'high' anxious children tend to have strong favourable attitude towards strict discipline of the child, as their mean scores on the scale are much above the mid point of the scale i.e. 45, the range of the score being 15-75. The mean scores of the fathers of 'low' anxious children being much below the mid-

point of the scale suggest that they have unfavourable attitude towards strict discipline of the child.

(ii) Fathers of anxious children tend to be more anxious, authoritarian and rigid than those of 'low' anxious children.

Table 2 compares mothers of 'high' anxious children with their counterparts of 'low' anxious children on child-rearing attitude and such personality factors as anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

TABLE-2

COMPARISON BETWEEN MOTHERS OF 'HIGH' AND 'LOW' ANXIOUS CHILDREN

Groups	Child-rearing attitude	Anxiety	Authoritarianism	Rigidity
Mothers of 'high' anxious children (N=40)	M 40.15	37.18	40.16	41.35
	SD 11.16	9.15	10.14	12.58
Mothers of 'low' anxious children (N = 40)	M 37.65	38.39	42.34	39.16
	SD 12.35	12.40	10.56	12.34
	't' 1.34	0.66	1.20	1.11

The following main trends may be noted in Table 2.

(i) There exists no significant difference between mothers of 'high' and 'low' anxious children in their attitudes towards child-rearing practices.

(ii) The mean scores of the mothers of the two extreme groups of children are much below the mid-point of the scale. This suggests

that mothers of both 'high' and 'low' anxious children are unfavourably disposed towards strict discipline of the child.

(iii) Mothers of 'high' and 'low' anxious children do not differ significantly on anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

Table 3 compares between fathers and mothers of 'high' anxious children on child-rearing attitudes, anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

TABLE-3

COMPARISON BETWEEN FATHERS AND MOTHERS OF 'HIGH' ANXIOUS CHILDREN

Groups	Child-rearing attitude	Anxiety	Authoritarianism	Rigidity
Fathers of 'high' anxious children (N=40)	M 56.55	44.38	54.13	55.30
	SD 12.12	8.61	9.65	11.14
Mothers of 'high' anxious children (N = 40)	M 40.15	37.18	40.16	41.35
	SD 11.16	9.15	10.14	12.58
	't' 8.54**	4.29**	7.19**	7.19**

**Significant at .01 level

The following main points may be observed in Table 3.

(i) Mothers and fathers of 'high' anxious children differ significantly with regard to their child-rearing attitude. Fathers tend to

have favourable and mothers unfavourable attitude towards strict discipline of the child.

(ii) Fathers tend to possess higher degree of anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity than those of mothers of 'high' anxious children.

TABLE—4
COMPARISON BETWEEN FATHERS AND MOTHERS OF 'LOW' ANXIOUS CHILDREN

Groups	Child-rearing attitude	Anxiety	Authoritarianism	Rigidity
Fathers of 'low' anxious children (N=40)	M 39.99 SD 11.46	35.10 12.15	44.26 10.14	38.17 10.50
Mothers of 'low' anxious children (N=40)	M 37.65 SD 12.35	38.39 12.40	42.34 10.56	39.16 12.34
	't' 1.21	1.67	1.06	0.52

Table 4 compares between fathers and mothers of 'low' anxious children and reveal the following points.

(i) There exists no significant difference between the child-rearing attitudes of fathers and mothers of 'low' anxious children. Both the parents seem to have unfavourable attitude

towards strict discipline of the child as their mean scores are much below the mid-point of the scale.

(ii) There is no significant difference between fathers and mothers of 'low' anxious children in anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity.

TABLE—5
CORRELATION BETWEEN CHILD-REARING ATTITUDE AND PERSONALITY TRAITS

	N	Anxiety	Authoritarianism	Rigidity
Child-rearing attitude of fathers	80	.32**	.41**	.33**
Child-rearing attitude of mothers	80	.14	.16	.19

**Significant at .01 level

Table 5 presents data on the relationship of child-rearing attitude with anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity in both the fathers and mothers of 'high' and 'low' anxious children. The table reveals that there is a significant positive correlation between child-rearing attitude and such personality factors as anxiety, authoritarianism and rigidity in the fathers of the children. In the mothers of 'high' and 'low' anxious children the relationship between child-rearing attitude and the above stated personality factors is though positive but not statistically significant.

Conclusions

The following main conclusions emerge from the analysis of the data of the present research:

(i) Anxiety in children seems to be associated with the strict and authoritarian child-rearing practices of the fathers.

(ii) Mothers do not seem to play any significant role in the genesis of anxiety in their children.

(iii) The anxious, authoritarian and rigid fathers tend to have a strict and stern disciplinary practices which may generate anxiety in children. This is, however, a tentative conclusion which may be verified in other researches involving larger sample, using better tools and controlling the effects of other important intervening variables.

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