
Exploring the Influence of Parenting Styles on State and Trait Anxiety among University Students: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

An individual's personality and traits are shaped by childhood experiences and parenting styles. Findings suggest that young adults experiencing severe anxiety have generally experienced varying levels of comfort, freedom, and feedback characterized by different parenting styles (Krohne, 1980). Since young adults are undergoing a critical transition in their university life, their susceptibility to anxiety i.e., state and trait is elevated reported by many studies. Consequently, the current research aims to study the relationship between parenting styles and trait and state anxiety in university students. It is a quantitative correlational study where data was collected from 200 university going students through convenience sampling. The Parental Authoritative Questionnaire (PAQ) and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Scale (STAI) were employed to study the variables. The data analysis was done through SPSS 22 and Pearson correlation and T-Test were calculated. The results indicated a positive correlation between authoritarian and permissive parenting style with state and trait anxiety and a negative correlation between authoritative parenting style with state and trait anxiety. A significant difference was found between the state anxiety of male and female students. The three

subscales of the father's parenting style indicated a substantial difference however no significant difference was indicated between the mother's parenting styles. Therefore, it was observed that parenting style has a considerable impact on both state and trait anxiety in university students.

Keywords: Parenting Styles, Anxiety, State Anxiety, Trait Anxiety

Introduction

Anxiety-related concerns are reported most commonly among other mental health issues by university students (Beiter et al., 2015). Anxiety is referred to as a constant feeling of apprehension and how one's body reacts in the condition of stress. Anxiety can be categorized into two i.e. state anxiety and trait anxiety. State anxiety is the situational and temporary feelings of worry that can be experienced in specific stressors e.g., examinations however, trait anxiety is referred to as an individual's persistent disposition to struggle with anxiousness across multiple situations (Spielberger et al., 1983). Both types of anxiety can lead to further mental health complaints, impairment in social, cognitive, and daily functioning, and academic achievement (Chapell et al., 2005).

Parenting styles are one of the many aspects of upbringing that can impact an individual's personality and mental well-being significantly. The different types of parenting styles i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglect are influenced by cultural values and society's norms and play an important role in shaping a person's anxiety levels (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). According to Krohne, trait anxiety emerges out of the same reasons as state anxiety which is due to lack of emotional support from parents (Krohne, 1980). Nadeem et al., (2016) reported that many university students struggle with anxiety in Pakistan which results in affecting their academics, peer relationships, and overall life quality. Findings suggest that an authoritative parenting style that is high in warmth, and comfort and allows a reasonable level of autonomy results in lower levels of

anxiety in university students of Pakistan (Arif & Anjum, 2019). Such students exhibit higher levels of self-worth, the ability to cope well, and better emotional regulation (Khan et al., 2017). In contrast, high levels of anxiety, especially trait anxiety, are observed in university students with authoritarian parents which provides strict control and a low level of comfort (Shah & Khan 2015). These students have feelings of fear related to failure, display perfectionist tendencies, and low levels of confidence contributing to anxiousness across multiple domains (Khan & Khan, 2018).

A permissive parenting style which first seems very supportive and allows great freedom due to lack of low levels of control and warmth from parents eventually leads to high levels of state anxiety in students as they are unable to create reasonable limitations and discipline for themselves (Rorka & Morris, 2009). Neglectful parenting style which is characterized to be most painful and damaging i.e., low levels of comfort and autonomy results in students struggling with the highest levels of both state and trait anxiety which can further develop into persistent or generalized anxiety (Singh and Kumar, 2022). It is quite evident that each different type of parenting style has a different impact on the way a child is brought up which leads to their level of anxiety when they are university students. (Muris, Merckelbach, Schmidt, & Mayer, 1998) Research reports that the gender of parents and the child also affects the relationship between current variables and significant gender differences were noted. Wolfradt et al. (2003) indicated that girls in authoritarian households displayed more trait anxiety as compared to males; whereas authoritative parenting styles led to lower levels of anxiety in both males and females.

The current study aims to analyze the association between parenting styles and state and trait anxiety and their psychological outcomes mainly in university students. The literature gap will be covered through the statistical analysis of the variables studied very limitedly previously so that suitable and helpful gender-appropriate awareness strategies and psychosocial interventions can be introduced.

Literature Review

The current research aims to study the relationship between parenting styles and state and trait anxiety in university students. Since university students are increasingly struggling with mental health issues, especially anxiety, the effect of parenting style must be taken into consideration to develop effective interventions.

Alloy et al., (2017) indicated anxiety in university students is affecting their academic progress, social health, and overall well-being; however, anxiety is a state or trait heavily depends on the kind of childhood experiences an individual has undergone i.e., parenting styles, peer relationships, etc. Parenting styles are understood in terms of warmth, freedom of control, communication, and independence given to the child and are an important feature in determining the disposition of anxiety in individuals (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Thomas, Khan & Ahmad, 2022). An authoritative parenting style with high warmth and control generally leads to lower levels of both state and trait anxiety in young adults (Verhoeven, Bögels, & van der Bruggen, 2012; Haider, Ahmad, & Ali, 2024). Ali, Ahmed, and Malik (2020) indicated in their research conducted in Pakistan that students whose parents adopted authoritative parenting styles were better at emotional regulation and experienced less anxiety in university. On the other hand, findings suggest that authoritarian parenting leads to higher levels of anxiety. Research conducted at a Chinese university indicated that students who reported having authoritarian parents experienced higher levels of trait anxiety because of the high expectations and pressure they felt from their parents in childhood (Chen & Liu, 2019).

In terms of permissive parenting style which is defined by high warmth and high autonomy also affects the levels of anxiety experienced by young adults. Findings from the study conducted by Rahman and Bano (2021) reported that Bangladeshi university students who had permissive parents indicated higher levels of state anxiety in examinations and difficult situations because of a lack of

structure and discipline in their childhood. Finally, research indicated that neglectful parenting style was found to be the most damaging in terms of anxiety in young adults. As it is characterized by low warmth and high autonomy, individuals feel a lack of support, affection, and concern from their parents resulting in high levels of both state and trait anxiety. A study held in India stated that university students who had neglecting parents displayed chronic anxiety and difficulty in managing their emotions and stress (Singh & Kumar, 2022).

Gender differences have been noted in many researches in terms of experiencing anxiety in relation to parenting styles in university students. Shah and Shah (2018) indicated that the relationship between parenting styles and anxiety can differ depending on the gender of the parent and child as well which makes this correlation even more complex. Findings suggest that female university students were more vulnerable to anxiety as compared to males due to cultural expectations and pressures. The authoritarian parenting style was reported to affect more negatively on female students' anxiety levels as compared to males (Alavi & Rehman, 2020). Ali and Khan (2016) also indicated in their study that girls raised by authoritarian parents were more susceptible to trait anxiety in university comparatively. On the contrary, Aslam and Tariq (2021) stated that males raised by authoritarian parents exhibited higher levels of state anxiety. Moreover, female university students with permissive parents displayed high trait anxiety affect teaching and learning (Fatima & Sheikh, 2019; Jabeen, Ali, & Ahmad, 2023) and the authoritative parenting style indicated the lowest level of anxiety in both male and female students (Khan & Awan, 2020). Findings indicate that parenting styles are a significant contributor to the predisposition and experiences of state and trait anxiety in both male and female young adults. It is imperative to understand these dynamics in Pakistani culture so that effective interventions can be developed for the betterment of the mental health of university students.

Research Methods

The current study is quantitative in nature and employed cross-sectional research design. The data was collected from different university students of Pakistan. The sample size of the research was $N = 200$ where 87 were male students and 113 were females. The ages of the participants were between 17 to 29 years old and the data was collected through sending out online forms. The non-probability, convenience sampling method was used to gather data for the research. Students enrolled in university were included in the present study. Students with any diagnosed psychiatric illness or mental health issues were excluded. The demographic form included details of the participants like age, gender, educational background and socio-economic status. This information was obtained through sheet of questions given at the start of the questionnaire.

Parental Authority Questionnaire

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (Baumrind, 1991) was employed to measure different parenting styles. This questionnaire consists of 30 items which identifies if the parent is authoritative, permissive or authoritarian. The score depends on the child's response to the questions related to both the mother and fathers' discipline, communication and involvement. Previously conducted studies have supported Parental Authority Questionnaire as a good measure of parenting style.

State Trait Anxiety Questionnaire

The State Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger et al., 1983) is commonly used to measure state and trait anxiety of an individual. This inventory is also used to distinguish it from syndromes of depression. This questionnaire has 40 items in total, 20 items assess trait anxiety whereas the other

20 assesses state anxiety. High scores in each or both of the two means that the person's anxiety level is high. The items on the questionnaire are self-report. Form Y is the most current and recent revision of STAI and it's in 12 different languages. All the other inventories on anxiety focuses on just one type of anxiety whereas this inventory focuses on both state and trait anxiety which is a new development.

Procedure

Recruitment of the participants were done with the help of online form. Convenient sampling was done and there were in total 200 participants in the study. Informed consent was given to the participants at the beginning of the questionnaire which had a brief description of the study that was being conducted. The aim of the research study was also mentioned in the consent form. The participants had to agree to the informed consent and then only they could start filling out the questionnaire. The questionnaire started with the demographic form following with the items of the parenting authority scale and state trait inventory scale. The data gathered was then transferred to SPSS version 2.1 for statistical analysis. On the basis of the results obtained through the tests run on SPSS discussion and conclusions were made.

Statistical Analysis

The data gathered was entered in Microsoft Excel and later was transferred to SPSS version 2.1. The analysis was done through different test of SPSS. The data gathered was organised through frequency, descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation, Independent Sample T test and ANOVA. Pearson Correlation was used to know the correlation between different parenting styles and state, trait anxiety. Following with, ANOVA which was run to know if parenting style has impact on state anxiety and in trait anxiety. Finally, Independent Sample T test was used to see the significant gender

difference in parenting styles and the two types of anxieties between male and female students.

Ethical Considerations

The aim of the research was to follow all the ethical rules and guidelines. Written consent was taken from the participants at the start of the online questionnaire. Ethical formalities were followed before carrying out the research as confidentiality was maintained and participants were given the right to withdraw at any given point in time. There was no kind of physical harm or psychological harm involved in taking part in the study.

Results

In order to analyse the scores that were given by the participants in the study, three tests were carried out. These tests include Pearson Correlation, Independent Sample T test and ANOVA. The table 1 includes all the frequencies of the demographic variables.

Table 1. *Frequency Tables for Demographic Variables (N=200)*

The table 1 displays the frequencies of some of the demographic variables i.e., gender and age.

Characteristics	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	87	43.5
Female	113	56.5
Age		
17-20 years	58	29
20-23 years	88	44
23-26 years	35	17.5
26-29 years	19	9.5

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics for Parental Authority Questionnaire and its subscales, State Anxiety and Trait Anxiety. (N=200)*

Note:

Range

Scale/Subscales	No. of items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>a</i>	Potential	Actual
MPAQP	10	30.76	7.95	0.89	10-50	10-50
MPAQA	10	30.08	10.01	0.94	10-50	10-50
MPAQF	10	32.54	8.76	0.94	10-50	11-50
FPAQP	10	30.74	8.00	0.90	10-50	10-50
FPAQA	10	29.94	10.04	0.94	10-50	10-50
FPAQF	10	31.94	8.92	0.94	10-50	10-50
SA	20	52.40	12.01	0.93	20-80	25-74
TA	20	52.62	7.55	0.83	20-80	33-67

MPAQP= Mother Permissive; MPAQA= Mother Authoritarian; MPAQF= Mother Authoritative; FPAQ= Father Parental Authority Questionnaire; FPAQP= Father Permissive; FPAQA= Father Authoritarian; FPAQF= Father Authoritative; SA= State Anxiety; TA= Trait Anxiety

The table 2 indicates that both Parental Authority Questionnaire and State Trait Anxiety Inventory with their sub scales had a good consistency and the highest reliability was found on Father’s Authoritarian, Father’s Authoritative, Mother’s Authoritarian and Mother’s Authoritative sub scales i.e. .94 followed by reliability coefficient of .93 of state anxiety’s scale. Then father’s permissive parenting style shows a good reliability of .90 which is very close to the reliability of Mother’s permissive parenting style which .89. Lastly the reliability of trait anxiety is .83.

Table 3 Mean, Standard Deviation and independent sample *t*- test values for Gender (*N* = 200)

Variables	Males		Females		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
	(<i>n</i> =87)	(<i>n</i> =113)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
MPAQP	31.51	8.12	30.18	7.79	1.17	.23	-.90	3.56
MPAQA	29.05	10.36	30.86	9.71	-1.2	.08	-4.6	1.00

MPAQF	32.44	8.72	32.61	8.83	-1.3	.39	-2.6	2.3
FPAQP	29.54	10.00	31.66	5.91	-1.8	.00	-4.3	.11
FPAQA	29.93	11.33	29.94	8.98	-.01	.00	-2.8	2.8
FPAQF	30.87	10.57	32.76	7.35	-1.4	.00	-4.3	.60
SA	53.35	12.95	51.66	11.24	.98	.035	-1.6	5.07
TA	53.32	8.12	52.08	7.08	1.14	.056	-.89	3.35

Note: MPAQP= Mother Permissive; MPAQA= Mother Authoritarian; MPAQF= Mother Authoritative; FPAQ= Father Parental Authority Questionnaire; FPAQP= Father Permissive; FPAQA= Father Authoritarian; FPAQF= Father Authoritative; SA= State Anxiety; TA= Trait Anxiety. **p<.01

The Table 3 shows that there is evident significant difference between males and females in state anxiety as in males state anxiety is high as compared to females. Whereas there is no significant difference between males and females in trait anxiety. Non-significant differences are observed in all three sub scales of mother (Permissive, Authoritarian and Authoritative) whereas there is a significant difference observed in all three sub scales of father three sub scales of father (Authoritarian and Authoritative), state anxiety and trait anxiety.

Table 4 Pearson Correlation between Parental Authority Questionnaire, State Anxiety and Trait Anxiety Scale. (N=200)

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 MPAQP	-	-.56**	.86**	.71**	-.41**	.63**	.55**	.58**
2 MPAQA	-.56**	-	-.53**	-.40**	.76**	-.41**	.49**	-.45**
3 MPAQF	.86**	-.53**	-	.69**	-.46**	.75**	.55**	.57**
4 FPAQP	.71**	-.40**	.69**	-	-.50**	.88**	.49**	.47**

5	FPAQA	-.41**	.76**	-.46**	-.50**	-	-.54**	-.43**	-.42**
6	FPAQF	.63**	-.41**	.75**	.88**	-.54**	-.53*	.52**	.52**
7	SA	.55**	-.49**	.55**	.49**	-.43**	.52**	-	.88**
8	TA	.58**	-.45**	.57**	.47**	-.42**	.52**	.88**	-

Note: MPAQP= Mother Permissive; MPAQA= Mother Authoritarian; MPAQF= Mother Authoritative; FPAQ= Father Parental Authority Questionnaire; FPAQP= Father Permissive; FPAQA= Father Authoritarian; FPAQF= Father Authoritative; SA= State Anxiety; TA= Trait Anxiety p< .0001

The table above illustrates the correlation between the sub scales of parenting style (Permissive, Authoritarian and Authoritative) and State, Trait anxiety of students studying in different universities across Pakistan. Mother’s Permissive parenting style (MPAQP) is highly positively correlated with state anxiety (.553** p<0.001). And Mother’s Permissive parenting style is also positively correlated with trait anxiety (.58** p<0.001). Whereas on the other hand Mother’s Authoritative parenting style is negatively correlated with state anxiety (-.49** p<0.001) as well as negatively correlated with trait anxiety (-.45** p<0.001). It is also shown in the table that there is a positive correlation between Mother’s Authoritarian parenting style and state anxiety (.55** p<0.001) also it is positively correlated with trait anxiety (.57** p<0.001). There is positive correlation between Father’s Permissive parenting style and state anxiety (.49** p<0.001) and also positive correlation between Father’s parenting style and trait anxiety (.47** p<0.001). Father’s Authoritative parenting style is negatively correlated with state anxiety (-.43** p<0.001) and also negatively correlated with trait anxiety (-.42** p<0.001). Father’s Authoritarian/Flexible parenting style is positively correlated with state anxiety (.52** p<0.001) and positively correlated with trait anxiety (.52** p<0.001).

Table 5
ANOVA to analyze the differences among state and trait anxiety between different parenting styles. (N=200)

Anxiety	Parenting Styles	M	SD	F	p
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State Anxiety	Authoritative (Mother)	32.54	8.76	3.02	.000
	Authoritarian (Mother)	30.06	10.01	2.30	.000
	Permissive (Mother)	30.76	7.95	2.88	.000
	Authoritative (Father)	31.94	8.92	2.89	.000
	Authoritarian (Father)	29.94	10.04	2.27	.000
	Permissive (Father)	30.74	8.00	2.87	.000
Trait Anxiety	Authoritative (Mother)	32.54	8.76	4.45	.000
	Authoritarian (Mother)	30.08	10.01	3.00	.000
	Permissive (Mother)	30.76	7.95	4.85	.000
	Authoritative (Father)	31.94	8.92	3.45	.000
	Authoritarian (Father)	29.94	10.04	2.90	.000
	Permissive (Father)	30.74	8.00	3.45	.000

The table 5 demonstrates that all the variables including the sub scales of the parenting styles of both the parents are all significant since all of the values are 0.00. The table also shows that the authoritative parenting style of mother has the highest mean score in trait and state anxiety both. This means that mother's authoritative parenting style has the greatest impact on trait and state anxiety. The mean score of mother's authoritative parenting style with state anxiety is 32.54 which is the highest comparatively. The mean score of mother's authoritative parenting style with trait anxiety is 32.54 which is also the highest comparatively.

Discussion

Parenting styles are imperative in understanding what kind of a relationship parents and a child share and their psychosocial environment while growing up (McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007; Imran & Akhtar, 2023). Baumrind elaborated on the types of parenting styles and their varying degree of warmth and autonomy which resulted in different levels of anxiety in children in relation to the expectations and feedback of the parents (Ratelle, Simard & Guay, 2012; Khoso, Oad, & Ahmad, 2023). In parenting styles with low autonomy, strict rules and high demands are observed which results in elevated anxiousness in children and in their adulthood as well (Cooper-Vince et al., 2014). On the other hand, Cooper-Vince et al., (2014) also stated that parents with no expectations and low levels of comfort also caused elevated anxiety in children. Authoritative parenting style in which ample guidance, comfort, and appropriate demands were set for children, low levels of anxiety were reported, and good psychological well-being was observed in adulthood (Fingerman & Birditt, 2012).

The current research hypothesized that there will be a negative correlation between the authoritative parenting style of both father and mother with state and trait anxiety in university students which is consistent with the literature. Khaleque (2017) studied the psychological adjustment of children and young adults across multiple countries and indicated that children who had authoritative parents experienced less anxiety due to the support and realistic expectations of their parents. In a study where both maternal and paternal parenting styles were investigated; it was reported that university students experienced low levels of both state and trait anxiety with parents with authoritative parenting styles (Milevsky et al., 2016). This is because such parents are rational towards their children, they are cooperative and supportive. Also, they encourage conversations and even if they set rules for them, they make sure that they give proper reasoning for it.

Another hypothesis, i.e., there will be a positive correlation between authoritarian and permissive parenting styles of both father and mother with state and trait anxiety is supported by the results of the current study and previous research. A study reported that students who experienced high anxiety had very little maternal support growing up (Asselmann, Wittchen, Lieb, & Beesdo-Baum, 2014; Ahmad et al., 2023) which is a characteristic of both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Braza, Munoz et al., (2015) stated in their study that daughters with authoritarian fathers exhibited physical aggression and sons internalized their aggression and high anxiety. A significant and positive correlation was found between authoritarian parenting style and trait anxiety because of the demanding and uncomfoting nature of the parenting style resulting in low self-esteem and fear of failure (Suárez, López, & González, 2021; Naeem, Ali, & Ahmed, 2022). High levels of state anxiety was reported by university students in Pakistan in a study due to high comfort and low control i.e., permissive parenting style and behaviors (Malik & Awais, 2017; Ahmad et al., 2024; [Imran, et al., 2023](#)). A study conducted in Lebanon (Hayek, Aboulhosn & Hamadeh, 2020) indicated a positive correlation between permissive parenting styles of mother and father with both state and trait anxiety in university students as also seen in the current research. These parenting styles result in high state and trait anxiety because both lie in extremes; the authoritarian parenting style imposes high expectations and high control which becomes difficult for children to live up to and the permissive parenting style sets low expectations and low support which results in a lack of guidance and discipline leading to anxiety.

The next hypothesis states that female students experience higher levels of state and trait anxiety as compared to male students. Findings suggest that a child's gender does have a relationship with anxiety, and it is influenced by gender roles e.g., girls are much more influenced by their parents as compared to boys (Graham & Weems, 2014; Ali, Shah, & Ahmad, 2023). In the present study,

through an independent sample T-test, it was found that there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of state anxiety where as there is no significant difference in males and females in trait anxiety. The results indicated that males have more state anxiety. A study conducted in Canadian universities indicated that male students reported higher levels of state anxiety whose parents were permissive in parenting and females with authoritarian parents indicated higher levels of trait anxiety; both state and trait anxiety were negatively correlated with males and females (Karavasilis, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2019; Aslam, Iqbal & Ahmed, 2022). Bahrami and Yousefi (2016) carried out research in Iran and found that male students with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles exhibited high levels of state anxiety. Culture must be taken into consideration since Pakistan has its own set of values and cultural norms in terms of gender especially.

Lastly, the final hypothesis which states that there will be a significant impact of parenting styles on trait and state anxiety is also supported by literature. A study conducted in India revealed that the rate of anxiety among university students correlates with the quality of time they spend with their parents. The results also showed that adolescents who had working mothers were found to be dealing with the most anxiety due to divided attention and comfort (Walsh et al., 2010). Also, in more of the research, it was highlighted that children who deal with inconsistent parental attention tend to deal with high trait anxiety and are more stressed as compared to other students in universities (Krohne & Krohne, 1985). The results of the present study and previous literature emphasize on the role of parenting styles on state and trait anxiety in university students which leads to vulnerability to other mental health concerns affecting the overall life. Appropriate measures should be planned for the betterment of our young adults and their mental well-being.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the manifestation of state and trait anxiety with respect to

different parenting styles in university students. The present study demonstrates that there is a positive correlation between permissive and authoritarian parenting styles and state and trait anxiety. There is negative correlation between authoritative parenting style (of both the parents) and state and trait anxiety. Parenting style have an impact on both state anxiety as well as trait anxiety was also noted. In accordance with the parenting style both the anxieties are significant. Significant difference was found in males for state anxiety and in the three parenting styles of father (Permissive, Authoritarian, and Authoritative). Whereas no significant difference was found in trait anxiety and the parenting styles of mother. As assumed, parenting styles has a significant influence on both state and trait anxiety which is why it is important that it is taken into consideration when studying anxiety concerns in young adults.

Limitations and Recommendations

The sample size of the study was limited as it included only 200 participants out of which number of males and females were not equal as well. This means that the sample was unrepresentative and cannot be generalised to the wider population. Moreover, as this is a quantitative study the responses are restricted and subjective point of views were not taken into consideration which leads to restrictive findings. Since there is a significant correlation between parenting styles and state and trait anxiety, this study should be replicated with a larger sample size so that generalisable results can be obtained. Researchers must put in efforts to make the questionnaire relevant but shorter so that participants are encouraged to participate. Significant gender differences were noted in the results which suggests that cultural differences should investigated with current variables as well in the future.

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