

CHILDHOOD ADJUSTMENT: THE EFFECTS OF PARENTING STYLES ON MOOD STATES

INMACULADA MONTOYA-CASTILLA, VICENTE PRADO-GASCÓ,
LIDÓN VILLANUEVA-BADENES Y REMEDIOS GONZÁLEZ-BARRÓN

Extended Summary

Introduction

Childhood adjustment refers to how one adapts both to oneself and to the reality of one's environment. A poor degree of adjustment is related with feelings of sadness (Riina & Mchale, 2014), problems of self-esteem or self-image, a lack of security in personal relationships, symptoms of anxiety (Naz & Kausar, 2014) and poor academic performance (Hernández-Guanir, 2009), among other things. Personal, social, school and family adjustment is interrelated (Hernández-Guanir, 2009). Childhood adjustment is influenced by several factors, some of which are personal and others that are related with the social and family environments (Farrington, 2005), among which can be found the individual's educational background, personality features, attitudes, beliefs, skills and parental relationships (Arshad & Naz, 2014; Camisasca, Miragoli, & Di Blasio, 2016). Interest has been focused on the interaction between parents and children and on the attitudes, that underpin these interactions, which give rise to differing child-rearing styles and practices, understood as global behavioural tendencies (López, Peña, & Rodríguez, 2008).

The most widely used model of parental child-rearing style was proposed by Baumrind (1966, 1971, 1989), and identifies three styles: (a) *authoritarian parents* (low levels of affection and high levels of control); (b) *permissive parents* (high levels of affection and low

levels of control); and (c) *authoritative or democratic parents* (high levels of responsiveness, affection and support and average levels of control). The authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are deemed to be two poles of a continuum, whereas the authoritative style is in-between two dimensions: warmth and parental control (Dwairy, Achoui, Farah, & Fayad, 2006).

The child-rearing styles of the parents affect both the evolutionary development and the long-term adaptation to different cultures (Baumrind, 1971, 1989; Dwairy et al., 2006; Rothrauff, Cooney, & An, 2009; Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014).

As regards the relationship between parental styles, emotional states and childhood adjustment, there are three issues that are worth noting. Firstly, it should be pointed out that most of the research has been performed from the perspective of the parents, overlooking how the child perceives how he/she has been raised, which could have a greater predictive value as far as childhood adjustment is concerned. Secondly, the research tends to refer to adjustment as a single psychosocial dimension; consequently, no studies have been found which analyse the influence of parental styles simultaneously in different environments (social, personal, school). Finally, the possible contribution of the child's emotional state to his/her adjustment appears to have been ignored. Childhood maladjustment is of importance, not only because of its psychosocial correlates but also because it could function as a pre-psychopathological state (Hernández-Guanir, 2009; Naz & Kausar, 2014; Riina & Mchale, 2014).

For all these reasons, this study will analyse parental style, emotional state and adjustment in three environments (personal, social and school), entirely from the perspective of children. Furthermore, any variations which gender may produce in this regard will be taken into account, as it is known that there is a greater likelihood that girls will suffer from affective disorders (Cruz, Narciso, Muñoz, Pereira, & Sampaio, 2013; MacEvoy, et al. 2016). The aim of this study is to analyse the predictive value of parental styles and emotional states as regards childhood adjustment from the point of view of children and bearing gender in mind.

Method

Participants

The participants were 1129 children of between 8 and 12 years old ($M = 10.03$ years old, $DT = 1.23$), of whom 588 were girls (52.1 %) and 541 boys (47.9 %).

All of the participants were middle class city dwellers in primary school.

Assessment tools

The sociodemographic characteristics were gathered by means of a questionnaire specifically developed for the purpose.

The child-rearing styles were assessed using the Identification Scales for “Family Child-Rearing Practices” (PEF; Alonso & Román, 2003). The moods were assessed by means of The Mood Questionnaire (Rieffe, Meerum-Terwogt, & Bosch, 2004) (Spanish adaptation: Górriz, Prado-Gascó, Villanueva, Ordóñez, & González, 2013). Childhood adjustment was assessed using The Multifactorial Self-Reported Childhood Adjustment Test (TAMAI; Hernández-Guanir, 2009).

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered, together with a more thorough list of assessment questions put together by expert researchers, in twelve primary schools of the Valencian Community. In each case, permission was obtained from both the pertinent authorities and the parents.

Data Analysis

Descriptive, correlation and regression analyses were carried out, as was the comparison of averages.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of the variables

Significant gender-related differences may be observed ($p \leq .001$), with the boys scoring higher in the Authoritarian style and School, Social and General Maladjustment. The girls, on the other hand, scored higher in the Democratic style and Fear.

Relationships between variables

As regards the parental styles, it can be seen that the Democratic and Permissive styles correlate moderately, in such a way that they appear to overlap slightly ($r = .23$, $p < .001$). As far as the emotional states and parental styles are concerned, only four significant relationships can be observed: The Democratic style relates to Happiness ($r = .18$, $p < .001$) and Sadness ($r = -.07$, $p = .03$); whereas the Permissive style relates to Sadness ($r = .12$, $p < .001$) and Fear ($r = .07$, $p = .02$). As for the relationships between maladjustment and parental styles, the Authoritarian and Permissive styles correlate positively with maladjustment, with the exception of the relationship between the Permissive style and Personal Maladjustment, which is negative but not intensely so ($r = -.01$, $p = .01$). The Democratic style however, relates negatively with every maladjustment dimension (over a

range $r = -.15$ to $r = -.26$). Lastly, the emotional states demonstrate a significant correlation of moderate to high intensity with each maladjustment dimension.

Predictor variables of childhood adjustment

Every regression analysis performed is hierarchical and includes all of the study variables as predictors of the three Maladjustment dimensions (Personal, School and Social), as well as General Maladjustment. In general, it can be seen that the models explain around 30 % of the variance in maladjustment and that the emotional variables are the ones that contribute the most information (in terms of explained variance - R^2 -). As regards Personal Maladjustment, the variables with the greatest predictive power are Fear ($SE \beta = .23$), Happiness ($SE \beta = -.21$), Sadness ($SE \beta = .18$), Democratic style ($SE \beta = -.17$), Permissive style ($SE \beta = .14$) and Anger ($SE \beta = .10$). As far as School Maladjustment is concerned, the variables with the greatest predictive power are Anger ($SE \beta = .29$) and the Democratic style ($SE \beta = -.29$), as well as Happiness ($SE \beta = -.11$), the Authoritarian style ($SE \beta = .11$) and the Permissive style ($SE \beta = .10$). As for Social Maladjustment, the variables with the highest predictive value are Anger ($SE \beta = .28$), the Democratic style ($SE \beta = -.24$) and Happiness ($SE \beta = -.17$), although the Permissive style ($SE \beta = .13$) and the Authoritarian ($SE \beta = .12$) also contribute to the model. Lastly, General Maladjustment is the dimension that is best explained by the model ($R^2_{adj} = .34$). Although all of the variables possess predictive value, the most important ones are: The Democratic style ($SE \beta = -.28$), Anger ($SE \beta = .27$) and Happiness ($SE \beta = -.20$).

As far as regression analyses are concerned, when separated according to gender, some differences are worth pointing out. In the first place, it may be seen that the Permissive style is a significant predictor for girls when it comes to their Personal, Social and General Maladjustment, but not in the case of boys. As for Social Maladjustment, the regression coefficient is significant for both genders, but more so in the case of girls ($SE \beta = .14$) than in that of boys ($SE \beta = .11$). Secondly, it

can be observed that Anger is only a significant predictor of Personal Maladjustment for boys ($SE \beta = .14$), and that Fear fulfils the same role in the case of Social Maladjustment for girls ($SE \beta = .10$), although it is true that in the latter, the difference between regression coefficients and associated probability is smaller. Lastly, it is only in the case of boys that the Authoritarian style can be seen to be a significant predictor of both School Maladjustment ($SE \beta = .10$) and General ($SE \beta = .11$), although the coefficients are low.

Discussion

From the perspective of children of between 8 and 12 years old, the Authoritarian style is the one most widely-used with boys. It is boys who demonstrate the greatest maladjustment in every environment, except for personal. Furthermore, the results suggest that the Authoritarian style predicts childhood maladjustment in every environment (Batool, 2013; Moed et al., 2015; Molina et al., 2016), except for the personal, and this is especially so in the case of boys. Bearing these results in mind, we can state that boys are (or they perceive themselves to be) raised by their parents using an Authoritative style and that this is harmful to them in terms of adjustment, especially in school (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009) and social environments (Muhtadie, Zhou, Eisenberg, & Wang, 2013).

According to the children themselves, the Democratic style is more commonly used with girls. According to the results both from this study and other, earlier ones (Akhter et al., 2011; Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009; Jabeen et al., 2013; Muhtadie et al., 2013; Piko & Balázs, 2012; Uji et al., 2014), the Democratic style is the best one to use to achieve the psychosocial adjustment of a child (Dwairy et al., 2006; Ritter, 2005). Therefore, and along the lines of the previous reasoning, it is no surprise that the girls demonstrate lower levels of maladjustment than the boys that took part in this study.

As for its predictive value as regards adjustment, the Democratic style scores slightly higher than the Authoritarian and Permissive styles; however, it must be said

that it is the emotional states that most commonly provide the best explanation of childhood maladjustment. Nevertheless, this study does contribute a very interesting observation on the subject of parental styles. It is that while the Authoritarian style is more predictive in the case of boys, the Permissive style is better when it comes to girls, both of them increasing maladjustment. So, the results from this study do not support the hypothesis that both the Democratic and the Permissive styles are the optimal ones to use in cultures such as the Spanish (García & Gracia 2009, 2010; Martínez & García, 2007; Musitu & García, 2004; Pérez, 2012). The Permissive style does not appear to be as harmful for boys as it is for girls, but the results do not allow us to conclude that it does not encourage childhood adjustment.

One of the most interesting contributions of this study is that it can simultaneously address different environments of childhood adjustment. The results suggest that the parental styles have no specific profile as regards their ability to predict adjustment. However, the emotional states do show a specific tendency depending on which environment we are concentrating on. This demonstrates that the research is underestimating the role which the experiencing of specific emotions plays in childhood maladjustment, as pointed out by Salguero et al. (2011). Parental styles may be important when predicting maladjustment (Camisasca et al., 2016; Claes et al., 2015; Cruz et al., 2013; Newland et al., 2014), but other variables must also be borne in mind, such as the emotional states (De Bolle et al., 2010; MacEvoy et al., 2016; Naz & Kausar, 2014), that stand out as being the best predictor. In particular, it is Fear, the absence of Happiness and Sadness that have a high predictive value for Personal Maladjustment, while in terms of Social and School Maladjustment an emotional pairing of Anger together with absence of Happiness may be observed.

This research represents an interesting approach to studying the influence of specific emotional states (both negative and positive) on development, suggesting that the emotions are relevant variables which must be included within any research into children's mental health and that by paying attention to them, painful and conflictive maladjustment may be prevented before it worsens and leads to psychological disorders. To go a little

further, it would be important to look into the possible mediating role of emotions in the relationship between parental styles and childhood maladjustment.