



MOTHER'S EXPRESSIVENESS AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between mother's expressiveness and child's behavioral problems i.e. conduct problems, emotional problems, hyperactivity and peer problems.

STUDY DESIGN

Cross sectional

PLACE AND DURATION OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted from January 2015 to August, 2015 in different schools of Lahore city.

SUBJECTS AND METHOD

One hundred and four (104) mothers were recruited in the study from five private schools of Lahore, Pakistan. The Modified version of Self-Expressiveness in the Family Questionnaire and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire were used for assessment.

RESULTS

Results were generated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and hierarchical regression. Results showed that there was a positive relationship between negative expressiveness of mother and behavior problems i.e. emotional problems and conduct problems and hyperactivity in children. It was further revealed that mother's negative expressiveness is likely to predict behavior problems in children. Lastly, it was revealed that girls showed more emotional problems than boys.

CONCLUSION

Negative expressiveness of mother was significantly associated with behavior problems. The findings implied important role in improving parent-child relationship and to address child's personality development.

KEY WORDS

Expressiveness, Behavioral development, Pre-school children

INTRODUCTION

Expressiveness is an important aspect of parenting behaviors and it largely affects child's behaviors.^{1,2} Expressiveness has been stated as "a persistent style or a pattern of exhibiting nonverbal and verbal expressions that often but not always appear to be emotion related and it is considered an important part of emotional communication with children".³ Further, Halberstadt et al. (1995) described positive expressiveness as "openness and sensitivity towards a child e.g. being appreciative, empathic, loving and concerned" while negative expressiveness was described as anger and contempt towards the child.⁴

Various behavior problems have been observed in childhood. In the present study, behavior problems i.e. conduct problems, attention, peer relationships and emotional problems were the focus of attention. Patterson, Reid and Dishion (1992) suggested an interactional model which pays most attention on the environment of home in developing conduct problems.⁵ The other important feature that develops in preschoolers is attention. During the preschool period the ability to pay attention significantly improves.⁶ The common problem related to attention that occurs during preschool period is hyperactivity. One other important development that occurs in preschoolers is the development of peer relationships. At this stage, parents play an important role in the success of a child's relationship with peers. Parents affect such relations through their direct interactions with their children, how they manage their children's lives, and the opportunities they provide their children.⁷ Childhood is also associated with growing awareness, understanding and regulation of emotions. Children learn through their interactions with parents and employ this understanding in their own interactions with peers.⁸

So, attachment theory explains that children with parents who are warm, sensitive and positively responsive will develop positive relationships and they will see world as safe place which are important for the social, emotional and behavioral development of a child.⁹ While, social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) says that behaviors are learned and modified through social processes during interactions with others.¹⁰ Thus, the present study explored the relationship between mother's expressiveness and behavior problems in pre-school children. It also explored the whether mother's expressiveness predicted the behavior problems or not. The study has following hypotheses;

H1: There would be a positive relationship between mother's negative expressiveness and child's behavioral problems i.e. conduct problems, emotional problems hyperactivity and peer problems.

H2: Negative expressiveness would predict child's behavioral problems.

H3: Boys would be more likely to show behavioral problems i.e. conduct problems, emotional problems, hyperactivity and peer problems than girls.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Participants

Sample comprised of mothers (N=104) of children with age range of 4- 6 years. Mothers were recruited from schools by employing purposive sampling. Both working and non-working mothers were included. Children with step mothers were excluded. Data was collected from five schools of Lahore.

Instruments

The Modified Version of Self-Expressiveness in the Family Questionnaire.

Expressiveness of mother was assessed by The Modified Version Self-Expressiveness in the Family Questionnaire.¹¹ In the present study, Self-Expressiveness in the Family Questionnaire was translated into Urdu language. The scale was translated following the Linguistic Validaitaion methodology by MAPI.¹² The chronbach alpha reliability of translated version was good for both positive (.80) and negative (.76).

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) in Urdu Language was used in the present study.¹³ Originally the scale consists of 5 subscales i.e. emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and prosocial behavior. In the present study conduct problems, hyperactivity, emotional problems and peer problems subscales were used. The Chronbach Alpha reliability of the subscales was good for conduct problems (.74) and hyperactivity (.70).

Procedure

For the research study, the permission to use the scales was obtained from respective authors. After permission from authors the next step was the approval of the study from the concerned department. For collection of data, permission letters were issued from the Institute of Applied Psychology. Schools were selected for data collection and permission was obtained from the school authorities. After that, mothers of children between the age ranges of 4 to 6 years were approached through schools when they came to pick their children at off time and questionnaire were given to them with informed consent. Ethical considerations were strictly followed. After data collection, statistical analysis was done to obtain results.

RESULTS

The study was conducted to examine the relationship between mother expressiveness and behavior problems in preschool children. Data analysis involved performing; (i) Descriptive statistics (ii) Correlation analysis (iii) hierarchal multiple regression. Firstly, it was hypothesized that there is likely to be a positive relationship between mother's negative expressiveness and child's behavior problems. Table 1 showed that negative expressiveness of mother positively correlated with behavior problems, emotional problems, conduct problems and hyperactivity in preschool children. Please add here the correlation values of strongly correlating.

Table 1
Correlation among the Study Variables and Demographics (N=104)

Sr.	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	SD
1	Positive		.37**	-.19	-.16	-.14	-.08	-.18	3.23	.50
2	Negative			.33**	.49**	.32**	-.15	.46**	2.01	.54
3	EP				.37**	.32**	.22*	.44**	34.71	20.78
4	Conduct					.35**	.16	.73**	21.78	12.84
5	Hyper						.15	.73**	12.93	12.48
6	Peer							.62**		
7	BP								32.45	14.50

Note. *.p < .05; **.p < .01; ***.p < .001; BP= Behavior problems; EP= Emotional problems; Conduct= Conduct problems; Hyper= Hyperactivity/inattention; Peer= Peer problems; Positive= Positive expressiveness; Negative= Negative expressiveness; education=education of mother

Further, it was hypothesized that negative expressiveness is likely to predict behavior problems in preschool children. Table 2 indicated that negative expressiveness of mother was positively predicting behavior problems in children. Step 1 explained 12% of the variance in behavior problems and the model is not significant as F (8, 95) = 1.65 p >.05. Model 2 explained 15% of variance in behavior problems and model is significant as F (10, 93) = 3.55 p <.05. So, this hypothesis was also proved. It was also revealed that negative expressiveness is likely to predict emotional problems as F (10, 93) = 2.61 p <.01 and conduct problems as F (10, 93) = 4.11 p <.01.

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Analysis showing Predictors of Behavior Problems, Conduct Problems, Hyperactivity, Peer Problems and Emotional Problems (N=104)

Predictors	Behavior Problems		Conduct Problem		Hyper activity		Peer Problems		Emotional Problems	
	ΔR ²	B	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	B	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	B
Step 1	.12		.13		.06		.08		.14	
Mother's Education		-.18*		-.19		-.06		-.12		-.23
Mother's Work Status		-.13		-.14		-.07		-.08		-.12*
Mother's Marital Status		.09		.09		.13		.03		.08
Child's Birth Order		.16		.22*		.08		.01		.04
Child's Age		-.11		-1.32		-.03		-.07		-.13
Child's Gender		-.00		.13		-.12		-.01		.28*
Family System		.03		.03		-.00		.02		.09
Total Children		.16		-.04		.06		.25*		.11
Step 2	.15		.18		.09		.01		.08	
Positive		-.03		.05		-.05		-.01		-.13
Negative		.43***		.47***		.31**		.11		.23*
Total R ²	.28**		.31***		.15		.09		.22**	

Lastly, it was hypothesized that boys are more likely to show behavior problems i.e. emotional problems, conduct problems, peer problems, hyperactivity as compared to boys. Table 3 showed

significant gender differences in emotional problems in pre-school children. Girls showed more emotional problems as compared to boys. So, the hypothesis was approved partially. No gender differences were appreciated in over all behavioral problems, Conduct problems, Hyperactivity/inattention, and Peer problems.

Table 3
Independent Sample t Test indicating Gender differences (N=104)

Variables	Girls (n=56)		Boys (n=48)		t(102)	P	95 % CL		
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	Cohen's d
#BP	52.86	29.93	55.20	20.76	.46	.65	-7.83	12.53	0.09
Emotional	18.39	13.15	13.02	11.38	-2.21	.03	-10.20	-5.55	0.44
Conduct	13.66	14.19	12.08	10.20	-.66	.51	-6.34	3.18	0.13
Hyper	20.09	13.96	23.75	11.23	1.46	.15	-1.32	8.64	0.29
Peer	19.11	13.18	19.38	11.04	.11	.91	-4.50	5.04	0.02

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; *p < .05; BP = Behavior problems; Emotional = Emotional problems; Conduct = Conduct problems; Hyper = Hyperactivity/inattention; Peer = Peer problems

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to explore mother's expressiveness and behavior problems in preschool children. The first hypothesis which stated that there is likely to be a positive relationship between negative expressiveness of mother and behavior problems, emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer problems in children was supported in present study except for peer problems. It can be correlated with the precious researches as Eisenberg et al. (1998) showed that negative expressivity is associated with behavior problems, lower levels of emotional knowledge and more emotional problems in children.¹ Further, researches showed that harsh parental behaviors and expressiveness are associated with the development of conduct problems in childhood.^{14,15} When a mother is expressing negative emotions towards her child, a child usually learns to express negative behaviors and deals with this by overt behaviors i.e. fighting or covert i.e. lying, stealing.

The second hypothesis, which stated that negative expressiveness is likely to predict behavioral problems in children, was also supported. Result showed that negative expressiveness of mother positively predicted behavioral problems in preschool children. Consistent with the previous research¹⁶, the present study indicated that negativity by a caregiver predicted more behavioral problems in children.

Lastly it was hypothesized that boys are more likely to show behavioral problems i.e. emotional problems, conduct problems, peer problems, hyperactivity as compared with girls was not supported. Present study showed no gender differences in over all behavioral problems and most of its components; only one component showed gender differences, girls showed more emotional problems. Slesnick (2004) suggested that girls showed more emotional problems i.e. anxiety while boys showed more conduct problems.¹⁷ So, the role of mother's emotions in the appropriate development of a child cannot be ignored.

CONCLUSION

Negative expressiveness of mother positively correlates with emotional problems, conduct problems and hyperactivity of children. It also significantly predicts emotional problems, conduct problems in children. Girls showed more emotional problems than boys.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- To increase the reliability and validity of the study, children behaviors should also be reported by fathers or teachers. Observational studies should also be used.
- Other parenting behaviors with mother's expressiveness should also be explored in relation to behavioral development in children.

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