School Involvement and the Barriers of Involvement Associated with Children’s Anxiety and Interpersonal Relations

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Abstract

This study examined parents school involvement, barriers to involvement and how these affect their children’s’ anxiety and interpersonal relations. We also examined gender differences in these child and parent variables. The study included 92 participants; mothers, fathers and children, were asked to complete a survey along with participating in an interview. Mothers’ showed greater school involvement than fathers. This study showed a weak negative relationship between mothers’ and fathers’ school involvement and children’s’ anxiety, and a weak positive relationship between mothers’ school involvement and children’s’ interpersonal relations. The implications for this study include; it can be used to demonstrate the importance of parent participation in the child’s school life, programs may be created, to offer support to these parents who struggle to get involved.

*Keywords:* parents’ barriers to involvement, school involvement, child anxiety, interpersonal relations, gender

School involvement and barriers of involvement associated with children’s anxiety and interpersonal relations

Anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental disorders today that have significant negative implications for different areas of children’s functioning. If left untreated, anxiety can have a profound impact on the emotional and social development of children including their interpersonal and peer relations (Pereira, Barros, Mendonco, & Muris, 2014). Parent involvement or the lack of is an important factor that can influence these areas of development. This study examines mothers’ and fathers’ levels in school involvement, as well as their barriers to involvement and the affect on the child’s anxiety levels as well as their interpersonal relationships.

Previous research has investigated relationships between anxiety sensitivity and parenting styles of (Erozkan, 2012). Anxiety sensitivity refers to the fear of behaviors and it plays an important role in determining the risk of developing various types anxiety disorders. Children in Mugla, Turkey between the ages of 15-18, were randomly selected to participate. Participants completed measures of the fear of anxiety-related awareness, and their perceptions of their parent’s attitudes and parenting styles. Results indicated that anxiety-related awareness was predicted by over protective and strict parenting styles. Research shows that parenting styles have different effects on children’s cognitive development, but there are also differences between the mother and the father’s behavior that can have an effect on child anxiety.

Anxiety disorders in children are more common if their parent suffers from an anxiety disorder, but other factors may mediate children’s anxiety (Pereira, et al 2014). It was hypothesized that children’s control beliefs would mediate the relationship between parental control behavior and children’s anxiety. It is also thought that interpretive biases would mediate between parental anxiety and children’s symptoms of anxiety. The participants consisted of 33 boys and 47 girls’ ages ranging from 7-12 and their parents. The children completed six different self-reports measures of; anxiety, cognitive variables, threat interpretation, and anxiety control. The parents completed three different self -report scales measuring: parental anxiety, overprotection and concern, and emotional warmth. Mothers’ trait anxiety and fathers’ overprotection and concern significantly affected children’s anxiety. The child’s interpretive biases as well as the child’s own threat interpretations fully mediated the relationship between maternal trait anxiety and child’s anxiety. A practical implication may arise with the increased knowledge of anxiety.

Previous research has aimed to examine the parents’ level of involvement regarding gender, education level, social status, income, and type of school the child attended. The study involved 1252 parents of children grades 1st – 5th from six different schools in Malatya Province

Participants completed a survey measuring volunteering, communication with teacher/school, providing a safe home setting, homework and supporting their children’s character growth. Results indicated that the mothers provide more help towards homework then the fathers. The income of the family had a positive effect on encouraging children’s development of their culture but a negative affect when it came to volunteering (Gurbuzturk & Süleyman, 2013). Research shows parent involvement to be beneficial for children, but there may be obstacles that prevent parents from being more involved.

Becker-Klien (1999) explained that parent involvement in child education is multidimensional, which includes the participation of the family in their home and at school. Barriers to involvement may be associated with: family demographics, family structural/contextual variables, and school level barriers. School level barriers will have more of an impact on family involvement than the other variables. The participants in this study were 151 families with a child in 2nd grade. The survey measured: family involvement, involvement in child’s education at home, involvement in school activities, family demographics, family contextual variables, school climate, and parent-school communication. Family school communication was the main variable that influenced family’s involvement with education at home. Research consistently demonstrates that parental involvement is beneficial to children.

Interpersonal relationships are important contributions to life of the child. Some children miss opportunities to develop the social skills needed throughout life such as the ability to initiate and maintain social relationships. Several factors contribute to children’s peer relationship problems. If the child is too aggressive or pushy, others will hesitate to continue a relationship, but if the child is too timid and shy to initiate interactions with others, the relationship will also fail. Some children are seen as different by their peers based on their- ethnicity, sex, a handicap, or just being new to the classroom. The most successful strategies used to help the children are ones that are matched to the child’s specific situation. Children who are unable to form peer relationships lack the opportunity to develop a sense of self-confidence. When behavioral issues are paired with social problems the struggle may increase for the child and those involved (Burton, 2010).

Children with ADHD have a greater chance of experiencing peer rejection than children without ADHD. Children’s peer relationships are important because they affect social and psychological adjustment. Children with ADHD tend to act out or have behavioral problems. Parents and teachers have difficulty giving a child with ADHD all the support they need. With positive guidance from both the parents and the teachers, the child with ADHD may be able overcome peer rejection (Mikami, 2010)

The purpose of this study was to investigate parents’ school involvement and barriers to involvement and how each of these affect children’s anxiety and problems in interpersonal relationships. We expect there to be associations between parent reported barriers to involvement, school involvement and child anxiety and interpersonal relationship problems. The second purpose of this study was to test gender differences in these parent and child variables. Though previous research has examined each of these constructs singularly, this study will examine them together in order to determine hot parents’ involvement may be related to the specific child outcomes. We expect that mothers will report more school involvement, and fathers’ will report more barriers to involvement. We hypothesize that girls will report more anxiety and problems with interpersonal relationships.

**Method**

**Overview**

This study used correlational and quasi experimental research designs. In quasi experimental designs the participants are not selected or grouped at random, naturally occurring variables are examined. In correlational designs relationships are made between variables, in this case between parent school involvement, barriers to involvement, child anxiety, and interpersonal relationships. Parent and child’s gender is the independent variable while parents’ school involvement, barriers to involvement, child anxiety, and child interpersonal relationships are the dependent variables. All constructs are measured at the ordinal level.

**Procedures**

Institutional Review Board approval, parent consent, and child assent were obtained prior to data collection. All measures and interviews were collected in the participants’ home. Data collected from children included: an explanation of the study followed by a written child assent form read aloud to each child. Children were told they would be providing oral (via interviews) and written (via surveys) responses to questions about parenting styles, their family relationships, self-concept, well being, and family activities. Data collection from parents also included an explanation of the study followed by a written informed consent letter, which parents read and signed. Parents completed the surveys independently of their partners. (Coyl-Shepherd & Hanlon, 2014)

**Participants**

A non-probability sampling technique was used in this study due to financial and time constraints. This study contained 92 participants, 36 males (39%) and 56 females (61%). The majority, 60% of children, 67% of fathers, and 64% of mothers were Anglo American; other ethnicities are included in the rest of the percentages. Children’s age ranged from 7 to 13 with a mean age of 9.5. Fathers’ age ranged from 25-62 with a mean age of 39.9. Mothers’ age ranged from 23-53 with a mean age of 37.8. The fathers worked an average of 38.9 hours a week with a range of 0-80 hours a week. Mothers working hours ranged 0-80 hours a week with a mean of 23.4 hours. The children of this study were the biological children of the father 78.3% of the time while biologically the mothers 94.5% of the time. Income levels vary from less than $5,000 a year to greater than $65,000 with a majority of the fathers (58.8%) and the mothers (55.2%) making greater than $65,000. The parents’ education levels range from less than high school to grad school. The majority of fathers (29.2%) and mothers (39.5%) having some college education.

**Materials**

This study included the *Barriers to Involvement* measure (Freeman, Newland, & Coyl 2008). This 16 item measure assessed parents’ perception of what barriers are most prevalent to their involvement with their children using a Likert scale. Sample items included, “I feel I don’t get to do all the things I like with my child because of… “Lack of energy” or “Work Schedules.” The items were answered on a 1(*strongly disagree*) to 5(*strongly agree*) response format. Responses were summed to provide a total score for each parent. Higher scores indicate a higher perception of barriers to the parents’ involvement. Cronbach alpha for fathers’ barriers to involvement is 0.85, for mothers’ it is 0.82.This measure provides quantitative data for this study.

The *School Involvement* (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007) measure was also used. This 5-item measure assessed parents’ motivations for involvement with their children using a Likert scale. Sample items included, “Regarding my child’s school progress” and “I read with my child.” Responses were answered on a 1(*strongly disagree*) to 5(*strongly agree*) response format. Responses were summed to provide a total score for each parent. Higher scores indicate a higher motivation to be involved with school. Cronbachs alpha for fathers’ school involvement is 0.76, for mothers’ 0.85. This measure provides quantitative data.

The study also included the *Behavior Assessment System for Children 2nd ed.* (Reynolds & Kamphus, 2004.) This measure had 13-items measuring anxiety, “I worry about little things” and 6 measuring interpersonal relations, “My classmates make fun of me.” Responses were answered either: true or false, or never, sometimes, often and always. The higher scores represent higher instances of anxiety and problems with peer relations. Cronbach alpha for child anxiety was 0.86, for child interpersonal relationships alpha was 0.87. Quantitative data was provided with this measure. The beginning of the surveys included demographic questions as well. Some sample items were: “children’s age, gender, parent age, family status, ect.”

**Results**

The focus of this study was to examine parents’ school involvement and their barriers to involvement and how these variables affect children’s’ anxiety and interpersonal relations. By using Pearson Product correlations associations of the variables were analyzed. Independent and paired sample t-tests were also used to examine gender differences in the parent and child variables.

Fathers’ barriers to involvement mean score was M= 39.31, SD= 10.65. Mothers’ barriers to involvement mean score was M= 20.20, SD= 10.33. Fathers’ school involvement mean score was M= 39.63, SD= 3.23. Mothers’ school involvement mean score was M= 22.01, SD= 8.47. Boys’ mean score for anxiety was M= 47.30, SD= 8.47. Girls mean score for anxiety was M= 49.57, SD= 9.81. Boys mean score for interpersonal relations was M= 52.23, SD= 11.11. Girls mean score for interpersonal relations was M= 53.76, SD= 8.01 (see Table 1).

We hypothesized that fathers’ had more barriers to involvement compared to mothers’. Also, that mothers’ are more involved in school than fathers’. The paired samples t-test failed to show a significant mean difference between fathers’ and mothers’ barriers to involvement, t(72)= -.73, p > 0.05). The paired samples t-test showed a significant mean difference between mothers’ and fathers’ school involvement, t(85)= -4.30, p<0.01). We hypothesized that boys have an easier time developing peer relations compared to girls. Also, girls have more anxiety than boys. The independent sample t-test failed to show a significant mean difference between boys’ and girls’ anxiety and interpersonal relations, for anxiety t(85)= -1.10, p>0.05). For interpersonal relations, t(88)= -0.76, p<0.05 (see Table 1).

What are the associations among mothers’ and fathers’ barriers to involvement and school involvement and children’s anxiety and interpersonal relations? There is a weak negative relationship between mothers’ school involvement and child anxiety, r(83)= -0.30, p<0.01). There is a weak negative relationship between fathers’ school involvement and child anxiety, r(82)=-0.23, p<0.05). There is a weak positive relationship between mothers’ involvement in school and child interpersonal relations, r(85)= 0.24, p<0.05 (see Table 2).

**Discussion**

We hypothesized that fathers’ had more barriers to involvement compared to mothers’. The paired samples t-test failed to show a significant mean difference between fathers’ and mothers’ barriers to involvement, but fathers reported a higher mean score for barriers to involvement. Therefore fathers are no more likely than mothers to have barriers to involvement. We hypothesized that mothers would be more involved in school than fathers’. The paired samples t-test showed mothers’ reported greater school involvement. We hypothesized that boys have an easier time with peer relations compared to girls. Also, girls have more anxiety than boys. The independent sample t-test failed to show a significant mean difference between boys’ and girls’ anxiety and interpersonal relations.

There is a weak negative relationship between mothers’ and fathers’ school involvement and child anxiety, indicating that as parent involvement increases, child anxiety decreases. There is a weak positive relationship between mothers’ involvement in school and child interpersonal relations, indicating that as mothers school involvement increases so does peer relations for the child. School involvement has a significant relationship between child anxiety and interpersonal relationships similar to the findings of Becker-Klien (1999). None of the other research paired school involvement and parent barriers to child anxiety and interpersonal relationships.

The study used measures that had already established reliability and validity. We used mixed methodology by using correlations and quasi-experimental designs adding to the strengths of the study. The limitations include that the study was not diverse, with the majority of participants being Anglo-American. Non-probability sampling technique was used in this study due to financial and time constraints preventing random sampling. The study shows that parental school involvement has a significant relationship between child anxiety and interpersonal relations, which show the importance of developing a program that allows parents to be more involved.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics, Alphas ,and t-tests, for Parents Barriers to Involvement and School Involvement, and Child Anxiety and Interpersonal Relations.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | α | M | Mdn | Mode | SD | t | Sig. |
| Father Barriers to Involvement | 0.85 | 39.31 | 39.00 | 39.00 | 10.65 | -0.73 | 0.24 |
| Mother Barriers to Involvement | 0.82 | 20.20 | 40.00 | 37.00 | 10.33 |  |  |
| Father School Involvement | 0.76 | 39.60 | 20.00 | 20.00 | 3.23 | -4.30\*\*\* | .00 |
| Mother School Involvement | 0.85 | 22.01 | 23.00 | 25.00 | 3.47 |  |  |
| Boy Anxiety | 0.86 | 47.30 | 47.00 | 50.00 | 8.47 | -1.10 | 0.15 |
| Girl Anxiety | 0.86 | 49.57 | 47.00 | 50.00 | 9.81 |  |  |
| Boy Interpersonal Relations | 0.87 | 52.23 | 56.00 | 59.00 | 11.11 | -0.76 | 0.23 |
| Girl Interpersonal Relations | 0.87 | 53.76 | 56.00 | 59.00 | 8.01 |  |  |

*Note. \**p < .05, \*\* p < .01, Mothers N= 86 Fathers N= 73 Boy N= 33-35 Girl N= 54-55

Table 2

*Correlations between Mother’s and Father’s Barriers to Involvement and School Involvement and Child Anxiety and Interpersonal Relations*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | Child Anxiety | Child Interpersonal Relations |
| Father Barriers to Involvement | 0.89 | -0.01 |
| Mother Barriers to Involvement | 0.51 | 0.17 |
| Father School Involvement | -0.23\* | 0.14 |
| Mother School Involvement | -0.30\*\* | 0.24\* |

*Note. \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01*