Parental Barriers and School Involvement Associated with Child Anxiety and Interpersonal Relationships

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential gender differences in parents barriers to involvement and school involvement and child anxiety and interpersonal relationship, as well the associations between parent and child variables. Ninety- two families with school age children participated and completed questionnaires. Mothers school involvement was significant greater than fathers. As mothers and fathers school involvement increased their involvement in school the children anxiety decreased. Also, as mothers school involvement increase, the children interpersonal increased as well. Findings indicate that it is crucial for parents to be involved within their children school for the children to succeed both in academics and peer relationships.

*Keywords:* School involvement, barriers to school involvement, child anxiety, interpersonal relationships

Parental Barriers and School Involvement Associated with Child Anxiety and Interpersonal Relationships

Parental school involvement has been broadly studied as one of the most important predictors of school achievement, not just in the United States but also all over the world (Vera, Israel, Coyle, Cross, Lynn, Moallem, Bartucci, & Goldberger, 2012). The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence parental school involvement and barriers to involvement, which may affect school age children’s anxiety and interpersonal relationship with peers. There has been limited research on gender differences in reported barriers to parental school involvement. It seems likely that parent involvement would be linked to child anxiety and may also influence children’s interpersonal relationship with others. Limited studies have examined the linkages between parent involvement and children’s peer relationship. This study was designed to do both; test for potential gender differences in this parent and child variables, as well as to examine the potential influence of parent barriers and involvement on child anxiety and interpersonal relationships.

 Tan and Goldberg (2009) investigated types of parents’ involvement in children’s education, both at school and at home with 91 families of school age children. Parents completed measures of parental school involvement interpersonal involvement, their perceptions of their child views of school; grades report from parents and teacher were also collected. Results showed that mothers are significantly more involved than fathers in all types of involvement. Fathers were more engaged in direct and interpersonal involvement with their daughters than sons, whereas mothers did not differentiate their involvement by child gender. Having at least one parent highly involved had more advantages for children’s enjoyment than having two low involvement parents. Interestingly, fathers direct involvement in school setting had a negative impact on the children’s grades and mothers’ direct school involvement was associated with children’s lower school enjoyment.

In comparison, parents involvement and positive peer relations are essentials for children's wellbeing because it affects them both at school and at home. Vera, Israel, Coyle, Cross, Lynn, Moallem, Bartucci, and Goldberger (2012) addressed the limited research on the relationships among a range of specific barriers and facilitators within parental school involvement. Vera et al. expanded on previous school involvement research on 236 parents with school-aged children. Parents completed a questionnaire measuring their barrier to school involvement, attitudes, and aspirations about their children’s education. Results showed the most common types of parental involvement were supervising the child homework and talking with child about school experiences. Positive school climate contributed to the usage of the community resources, better communications with the teachers and reduced the negative school experiences. The findings suggested that parents should be informed about what resources are available for them, which will encouraged parents to be more involved in their children school.

However, in Ouellette and Wilkerson (2008) examined a management training programs that described types of parental barriers and strategies to overcome the barriers on parents that have youth at risk. Most interventions have focused on youth or school, while there have been few interventions focused on parent or family. When parents finish the program, results showed an increase in resilience for school success, parenting management capacity, improvement in mother’s psychological health, and reduce antisocial behavior of child. However, Parents’ participation is low because of barriers such as availability, childcare, distance, socio-cultural stigma, and parent view of social status of educator trainer. A lot of solutions have been taken into account to improve parents’ participation such as having the program in school and community based locations, attending cultural and context relevance, having incentives for parents, providing child care, and parents .In conclusion, parental school involvement is important because it encourages parents to talk about the value of education with their children, monitoring child academic performance, and gives them hope.

In contrast the article *Building Connections with Parents & Communities* aimed to address the misperceptions school leaders have as to why parents lack school involvement at their students’ school meetings.  It describes the importance of the school leaders’ role in building meaningful reciprocal connections with students, their parents, and the community in spite of the challenges or community context. School leaders examined their personal beliefs in order to begin to move forward in the work they do as leaders they need to use their objective answers to these question to examine their bias perceptions and build trusting relations to increase parents’ participation at schools (Gonzales & Thomas, 2011).

Conversely, Scharfstein, Alfano, Beidel, and Wong (2011) studyaimed to address the limited empirical research collection on peer relations and difficulties in children with general anxiety disorder (GAD). Thi study directly compared peer relationships of children with a primary diagnosis of GAD (without comorbid SAD), separation anxiety disorder (without comorbid GAD), and a healthy control (HC) group without the presence of a diagnosis. The researchers hypothesized that children with SAD would exhibit greater peer relation’s difficulties than children with GAD and HC (Scharfstein, Alfano, Beidel, & Wong, 2011).The sample consisted of 54 children who participated from a larger study on anxiety arranged by the demographic of age, sex, and race/ethnicity and the clinical characteristics of GAD, SAD, and HC. All the children and their parent(s) completed an in-person evaluation. The results suggested, parents of children with GAD and SAD were more likely to report their child had fewer friends and less likely to report that their child had the same amount or more friends relative to peers than parents of HC children. Children with GAD did not differ significantly from children with SAD on parent reported number of friends. However, children with SAD were reported by the parents as having experienced significant difficulty making friends compared to parents of HC children and children with GAD. For all three groups, no significant differences were found for having a friend, difficulty-keeping friends, or participating in groups or clubs. The research highlights the importance of “social skills training to aid children with SAD in establishing the basic skills necessary to achieve developmentally appropriate interpersonal relationships” (p.720).

 In comparison, Festa, and Ginsburg (2011) studycontributed to etiological models of social anxiety in school age children by researching the relative importance of parental variables (i.e., parental anxiety, parental overcontrol, and parental rejection) and peer variables (i.e., social acceptance, social support, and friendship quality) in understanding youth social anxiety. Multiple data of child social anxiety have been examined however, only a limited number of studies have addressed the direct association of social support and social anxiety in youth. The researchers hypothesized that parental anxiety, parental overprotection, and parental rejection would be associated positively with children’s level of social anxiety and parental behaviors of overcontrol and rejection would be main outcomes of child social anxiety compared to parental anxiety. Social acceptance, social support and friendships quality would be associated negatively with children’s level of social anxiety. The sample consisted of 63 primarily Caucasian, upper-middle class children and their biological parents. All children and their parent(s) completed an in-person evaluation. The parent(s) participated in a larger anxiety prevention study where they were divided into two groups: one group with anxious disorders and the second without a clinical diagnosis of social anxiety disorder. Both parent and child completed measures. The results suggested that higher levels of parental anxiety, over control, and rejection were associated with higher levels of social anxiety. Social support acceptance and peer validation were associated with lower levels of social anxiety. Overall the main predictors of child related social anxiety were parental anxiety, friendship quality, parental over control and perceived social acceptance

The purpose of this study is to examine gender differences in parent school involvement and barriers to involvement within families of school age children. We hypothesized that mothers have higher school involvement compared to fathers and that mothers would report higher barriers to involvement than fathers. Parental school involvement is important because it encourages parents to talk about the value of education with their children, monitor child academic performance, and potentially reduce child anxiety. Additionally, we examine child gender differences in anxiety and the quality of peer relationships. We further hypothesized that boys would report less anxiety and interpersonal relationships than girls. Finally, we examine the association between parents’ barriers to involvement, reported levels of school involvement in relation to child anxiety and interpersonal relationships.

**Methods**

**Overview**

The research design used in this study was a combination of quasi-experimental and correlation because it is comparing groups of parent and child gender and the relationship among parent and child variables. The independent variables were the parents and child gender. The dependent variables were parents’ barriers to involvement, school involvement, child anxiety, and interpersonal relationships. The two parents predictors were parents’ barriers to involvement and school involvement. The two outcomes were child anxiety and interpersonal relationships. The level of measurement for each of the four variables is ordinal.

**Procedure**

Research assistants gathered local parents within the community networks and data was collected. When approved by the Institutional Review Board and with the permission of the parents, research assistants interview children within their homes. Prior to the interview, children were given a description of the study and research assistant read the child assent form out loud, which notified them that they will part of an oral and written section. The section measured parenting styles, their family relationships, self-concept, wellbeing, and family activities. Research assistant inform children that they were able to stop or skip any items without any penalties. After a written consent letter was read and signed by parents, the research assistants gave parents an explanation of the study. Parents interview and surveys were done independently and were informed that they were able to stop or skip any items without any penalties (Coyl-Shepherd & Hanlon, 2014).

**Participants**

Participants were 92 families with school age children drawn from a non-probability sampling technique (participants were not selected at random) within local community networks of primarily Anglo ethnicity (67.4% father, 64.1% mother, and 60.0% child). The children ranged in age from 7 to 13 years, with a mean age of 9.47.  There were 56 females and 36 males (60.9% females, 39.1 males).  The parents’ who completed the survey and questionnaire ranged in age from 25 to 62 years for fathers’, with a mean age of 39.85 and for mothers’ 23 to 53 years, with a mean age of 37.81. The majority of families consisted of biological parent households (94.5% mothers’, 78.3% fathers’) with annual incomes greater than $65.000 (58.8% fathers’, 55.2% mothers’) and who had completed some post-secondary education at the Bachelors level.

**Measures**

All participants completed an in-person clinical interview which, the level of measurement variables was completed at an ordinal level of measurement.  Parents’ completed demographics questionnaire regarding self and their child (i.e. gender, age, and ethnicity, relation to child, income and education level).

***Barriers to Involvement.***

Parents rated 16 statements regarding their *Barriers to School Involvement* with a 5- point Likert response scale (Freeman, Newland, & Coyl, 2008).  Sample items included, “I don’t like spending time with my child”, “stress in my life”, and “work schedule”.  Items were answered on a 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*) response format. Parent responses to each item were summed to provide a total score for barriers to involvement (fathers’ alpha = .85; mothers’ alpha = .82). Higher scores indicated greater levels of barriers to involvement. This measure provides quantitative data about parent barriers to involvement.

***School Involvement***

Parents completed five statements regarding their involvement in the child’s school progress with a five point Likert response scale (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Sample items included, “I supervise my child’s homework”, “I read with this child”, and “I talk with this child about his/her school day”. Items were answered on a 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*) response format.  Responses to each item were summed to provide a total scores of school involvement for each parent (mothers’ alpha = .85, fathers’ alpha = .76). Higher scores indicated greater levels of school involvement. This measure provides quantitative data about parent school involvement

***Behavior Assessment System for Children***

Children completed the anxiety and interpersonal relationships subscale of BASC-2 SRP (Reynolds, & Kamphaus, 2004).  The anxiety measure consisted of 13 items; sample items included, “I often worry about something bad happening to me”, “I worry about little things”, and “I’m bothered by thoughts about death”. Items were answered on a T and F (*true and false)* and N (*never*), S (*sometimes*), O (*often*), A *(always*) response format.

Interpersonal relationships measure consisted of six items; sample items were, “My classmates don’t like me”, “Other children don’t like to be with me”, and “Other kids hate to be with me”.  Items were answered with a Likert type scale and T or F response format.  Responses to each item were summed to provide a total anxiety and interpersonal relationships score for each (child anxiety alpha = .86, child interpersonal relationships alpha = .87). Higher scores indicated greater levels of anxiety and more interpersonal relations. This measure provides quantitative data about child anxiety and more interpersonal relationships.

**Results**

The primary goal of this study was to examine gender differences for the parent and child variables, as well as the relationships between the parent variables and the child variables. To analyze the statistical data for the parent and child gender differences a paired sampled *t*-test was conducted. Additionally, a correlation was conducted to determine the association between the parent and the child variables.

Fathers’ barriers to involvement mean score was *M* = 39.31, *SD* = 10.65; Mothers’ barriers to involvement mean score was *M* = 39.58 and *SD* = 10.33. Mothers’ school involvement means score was *M* = 22.01, *SD* = 3.4; Fathers’ school involvement mean score was *M* = 20.18, *SD* = 3.23. Boys’ anxiety mean score was *M* = 47.30, *SD* = 8.47; Girls’ anxiety mean score was *M* = 52.23, *SD* = 11.11. Boys’ interpersonal mean score was *M* = 53.76, *SD* = 8.00 (see Table 1). The paired samples *t*-test showed a significant mean difference between mothers’ and fathers’ school involvement, *t* (85) = -4.30, p < .01. However, there were no significant difference between mothers’ and fathers’ barriers to involvement, *t* (72) = -0.73, p > .05. For the child, the *t*-test for independent samples did not show a significant difference between boys’ and girls’, anxiety *t* (85) = -1.10, p > .05 and interpersonal relations *t* (88) = -0.76, p > .05 (see Table 1).

In order to show the associations among parent’s barriers to involvement and school involvement and children’s anxiety and interpersonal, the strength and direction correlations was examined. There was a weak, negative statistically significant relationship between fathers’ and mothers’ school involvement and child anxiety, Fathers *r* (85) = - 0.23, p < 0.05 and Mothers *r* (85) = - 0.30, p < 0.05. There also was a weak, positive statistically significant relationship between mother school involvement and child interpersonal relationships, *r* (85) = 0.24, p< 0.05 (see Table 2).

**Discussion**

The primary goal of this study was to examine the gender differences for the parent and child variables, as well as the relationships between the parent variables and the child variables. To analyzed parent and child gender differences *t*-tests were conducted. Additionally, to determine the association between the parent and the child variables a *correlation* analysis was done.

It was hypothesized that, mothers’ would have higher barriers to involvement and school involvement; boys’ would have less anxiety and interpersonal relationships than girls. For the associations among mother’s and father’s parent barriers to involvement and school involvement and children’s anxiety and interpersonal relations, it was hypothesized, mother’s barriers to involvement would be positively associated with child anxiety and father’s school involvement would be positively related to child interpersonal relationships.

The findings for the *t*-test showed a higher mean score for mothers’ school involvement compared with fathers’. There was no difference between mothers’ and fathers’ barriers to school involvement. There was no difference between boys’ and girls’ anxiety and interpersonal relationships. The results for the correlation analyses showed weak correlations between mothers’ and fathers’ school involvement and child anxiety, as fathers’ and mothers’ school involvement increases, child anxiety decreases; A weak positive correlations between mothers’ school involvement and child interpersonal relationships was also found. In comparison our study suggested similar findings of mothers showing higher school involvement than fathers and no gender differences for barriers to involvement. However, none of the previous research reviewed on child anxiety match our findings.

Strengths for this study was, previous research have examined the same population sample with primarily Anglo families with middle class social economic status and diverse parents’ educational level. Limitations for this study were the low sample number of diverse ethnicities and social economic status representation. As well as it would be beneficial to be looked over longitudinal.

 This study is beneficial for parents to examined the causes and effects for both their school involvement and barriers to involvement in their children’s learning experiences and interpersonal relationships both inside and outside the classroom; in order to foster child’s peer relations, academic enjoyment and success. As well as to decrease child related anxiety and mutual communication with child’

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 and Interpersonal Relationships

2. Correlations Between Parents Barriers to Involvement, School Involvement 7

and Child Anxiety, Interpersonal Relationships

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics, Alphas and t tests for Parental Barriers to School Involvement, School Involvement, Child Anxiety, and Interpersonal Relationships*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | α |   M  | Mdn | Mode | SD | t  | Sig. |
| Father Barriers to Involvement | .85 | 39.31 | 39.00 | 39.00 | 10.65 | -.73 | .24 |
| Mother Barriers to Involvement  | .82 | 39.58 | 40.00 | 37.00 | 10.33 |  |  |
| Father School Involvement  | .76 | 20.18 | 20.00 | 20.00 | 3.23 | -4.30 | \*.000 |
| Mother School Involvement | .85 | 22.01 | 23.00 | 25.00 | 3.47 |  |  |
| Boy Anxiety  | .86 | 47.30 | 47.00 |  50.00 |  8.47 | -1.10 | .014 |
| Girl Anxiety  |  | 49.57 |  |  | 9.81 |  |  |
| Boy Interpersonal Relationship  | .87 | 52.23 | 56.00 | 59.00 | 11.11 | -.76 | .24 |
| Girl Interpersonal Relationship  |  | 53.76 |  |  | 8.00 |  |  |

*Notes*. Child males N=36, Child Females N=56, Mothers N= 92, Fathers N=92

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

Table 2

*Correlations Between Parents Barriers to Involvement, School Involvement and Child Anxiety, Interpersonal Relationships*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | Child Anxiety  | Child Interpersonal Relationships  |
| Father Barriers to Involvement  | .09 | -.01 |
| Mother Barriers to Involvement | .05 | .17 |
| Father School Involvement  |  -.23\* | .14 |
| Mother School Involvement |  -.30\*\* |  .24\* |

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