

***Parenting styles in Iranian families of adolescents with and without  
conduct disorder \****

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**Received: 16. 5. 06      Revised: 26. 6. 06      Accepted : 26.8. 06**

**Objective:** This study was conducted to investigate parenting styles and associated variables in families of adolescents with and without conduct disorder (CD).

**Method:** We used a survey method to assess 120 parents (60 with and 60 without CD adolescents). For gathering the data, we administered Parenting Styles Questionnaire (Robinson, Mandlco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001), and DSM IV (1994) criteria, respectively for parenting styles and CD diagnosis.

**Results:** The principal findings of the study were that the parents of adolescents with CD are less authoritative, and more authoritarian than the comparison group. No significant difference was found on permissiveness. Furthermore, the findings showed a significant relationship between parents' socioeconomic status (SES) with the disorder. **Conclusion:** These data would suggest that familial variables, especially parenting styles and SES are associated with CD. We discussed the clinical implications for etiology, prevention, and treatment.

**Keywords:** *parenting styles; conduct disorder; adolescents*

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\* This study has been presented in the 9<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Psychology, Granada, 2005, Spain. The abstract was published in the proceeding compact disc

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## **Introduction**

There is an urgent need to greater understanding of the processes that contribute to the development of disruptive disorders, including conduct disorder (CD). CD is a serious psychopathological disorder, in terms of both the severity and adverse outcomes (Farrington & Loeber, 1999). A child or youth who has CD exhibits a persistence pattern of antisocial behavior that significantly impairs everyday functioning at home or school or leads others to conclude that the youngster is unmanageable (Kazdin, 1994; Walker, 1995). Estimates of the prevalence of conduct problems vary according to the criteria and the definitions used (Angold & Costello, 2000). Hill (2000) suggests, on the basis of the majority of epidemiological studies, between 5% and 10% of children in the ages range 8-16 have significant persistent oppositional, disruptive or aggressive behavior problems. Many of the features are seen in social interactions, notably verbal and physical aggression, bullying, oppositional behavior, and lying. This means that symptoms of the disorder are also social and impact on family, peer, educational and wider social relationships, and even will partly impact on children antisocial behaviors in next generations (Smith & Farrington, 2004).

Association between a wider range of family characteristics and CD problems has been documented. The families of CD adolescents

tend to be characterized by antisocial or criminal behavior of parents and siblings. Often, homes and family relationships are chaotic and unsupportive of normal social; development or are characterized by physical or sexual abuse (Campell, 1995; Kazdin, 1998). There are many children in the family. Parental monitoring of children's behavior tends to be lax or almost nonexistent, and discipline tends to be unpredictable but harsh, and opposite of what is required for a well-socialized child (Dishion & Patterson, 1996).

Harsh, critical and ineffective parenting is particularly relevant to the onset of early conduct problems (Beauchaine, Webster-Stratton, & Reid, 2005; DeKlyen, Speltz & Greenberg, 1998). First, high parent-child conflict is typified by frequent arguing, harsh physical punishment, and overt dislike of the child by the parent (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001). A second parenting risk is low monitoring, including lack of parental awareness of children's companions and whereabouts, and of the ways in which time is spent (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Third, a lack of "positive involvement" with the child includes low emotional support and fewer expressions of interest in the child's activities (Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1999).

Parenting styles is a pervasive and crucial factor that plays an important role in children's development and psychopathology. It is

almost impossible to discuss any aspect of children's difficulties without considering parent's attitudes, behaviors and rearing styles. Parenting styles may be defined as "aggregates or constellations of behaviors that describe parent-child interactions over a wide range of situations and that are presumed to create a pervasive interactional climate" (Mize & Pettit, 1997). As parenting styles are not culturally dependent, unlike parenting behaviors or parenting practices, relatively similar styles may be found in different societies (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Thus, we postulate that a similar definition for parenting styles could be meaningful in Iran.

Baumrind (1971), a pioneer researcher on parenting styles has conceptualized various types of parenting styles, including authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Authoritative parents seek to direct their children in a rational yet democratic manner. Children reared in this style feel both enough freedom and control. These children show better psychosocial maturity, and cooperation with others (Baumrind, 1971). Children whose parents have authoritative styles are more self-controlled, and have less behavior problems (Mauro, & Harris, 2000; Pettit, Dodge & Brown, 1988; Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992), and can have warm and respectful relationships with their peers (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritarian parents characteristically impose many limits and demand strict obedience

without explanations. These parents are usually less responsive to their children's feelings and thoughts, and are less democratic. Children of authoritarian parents tend to be more unhappy, less successful in school achievement and to have poor relationships with their peers (Putallaz, 1987; Hart, Ladd, & Burleson, 1990). Permissive parents, unlike others, are not controlling and impose fewer regulations, orders and responsibilities. These parents rear children with lower self-esteem, lower self-control and less self-reliance (Loeb, Lorst, & Horton, 1980). In most families, however, none of these styles exists in pure form and parents use different combinations in different conditions.

### **Parent-child interaction in Iran**

Iranian population includes three major groups: urban, rural and seasonal migrants (*Ashayer*). Basically, Iranian family has evolved over the centuries in its own way. This evolution has been influenced by different factors including pre-Islamic (ancient Persian) and Islamic traditions, and the influences of the Turkish and Mongol kinship systems (Nassehi-Behnam, 1985).

About 99% of people are Muslim and directly or indirectly have been influenced by the Islamic (Shiite) culture. People are inspired by the religion. According to the Koran, human entity, as a metaphor, is a

potential compound of Satan and God. Human has two aspects of Satan and God and for this reason, the word for *rearing* in Iran is derived from this concept as *tarbiat*, which means becoming Godlike.

Ghazzali (1050-1111), the great Iranian philosopher and educator suggested the ideas that may be observed in the Iranian rearing style even now. He holds that father must ensure education of his children, instruct them according to the Precepts of faith, teaches them how to speak, how to eat, and to tell the truth. The father must give the children knowledge of science, arts and profession and the girls must be instructed household management, chastity, dignity, and prudence (Nassehi-Behnam, 1985).

Now, let's turn to the new discussions on parenting in Iran. Nowadays, Iranian culture assigns a high value to the mothers' role and mothers are usually the cores and responsible for child-rearing (a very common notion among the people says: *the child is reared by mother*). In a recent research, Hojat, Shapurian, Nayerahmadi, Farzaneh, Foroughi, Parsi, & Azizi (1999) evaluated the attitude of Iranians inside Iran and compared them with their counterparts in the U.S. The majority believed that mother must be available for the child. Three fourths of the subjects believed that the maternal employment is detrimental in child's life. The authors also found that Iranians believe that too much freedom for youngsters may make trouble for them.

Accordingly, a small part of the parents let their teenagers go out in the evening without parental permission. Essentially, the parents believe on restricted freedom for teenagers. Generally, in the Iranian culture boys have more freedom than girls. For example, boys have a little more freedom to have girl friends but girls do not. According to Hanassab (1993) these discriminations cause children to lose their trust to their parents' judgment.

About parenting styles in the Iranian families, Touba (1979) concludes that the dominant style is probably authoritarian. In the last decades, particularly because of considerable cultural and political reforms, Iranians are more willing to accept democracy. On the basis of our anecdotal observations, this mentality has also been reported in the familial system, especially in parent-child interactions.

In all, we believe that CD and parenting styles are related, and the present research attempts to unfold how having an adolescent child with CD and parenting styles are related. The hypotheses of this study are: 1) there exists difference between authoritative parenting style in families of adolescents with and without CD, 2) there exists difference between authoritarian parenting style in families of adolescents with and without CD, 3) there exists difference between permissive parenting style in families of adolescents with and without CD, 4) there exists difference between SES in families of adolescents with

and without CD, 5) there exists difference between family members number in families of adolescents with and without CD, 6) there exists difference between academic achievement in adolescents with and without CD.

## **Method**

### ***Subjects***

The sample consisted of 120 parents of adolescent students from the state schools in Tehran, of whom 60 were parents of children with, and 60 were parents of non-CD children. The subjects were matched with respect to demographic characteristics. The mean age for parents of CD children group was 42 ( $SD = 3.1$ ), while the mean age for parents of non-CD children group was 39 ( $SD = 3.7$ ). First, for screening, we went to the schools and explained about some of the major characteristics of CD children to the teachers and then asked them to help us find such students in their classes. Then, the parents were asked to complete the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) criteria, and then Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (Robinson et al., 2001).

### ***Procedure***

The data were collected in the academic year 2003-2004. The first author translated the questionnaires into Persian (Farsi). The translations were then reviewed with two Iranian experienced psychologists with good knowledge of English. All parents were asked to complete Parenting Styles and Dimensions (PSD) for both themselves and their spouses.

### ***Measures***

*Parenting Styles.* This was measured using Parenting Styles and Dimensions (Robinson, et al., 2001). PSD is a 32-item questionnaire, with adequate reliability and validity. The questionnaire measures three main parenting styles as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Both mothers and fathers can complete the same measure, except the pronoun is different. The questionnaire uses a Likert scale including 1= *Never*, 2= *Once in awhile*, 3= *About half of the time*, 4= *Very often*, and 5= *Always*. Authoritative items have a Cronbach alpha of .86, authoritarian items have a Cronbach alpha of .91, and permissive items have a Cronbach alpha of .75 (Robinson et al, 1995). The internal reliability of the questionnaire has been reported as Cronbach alpha of .76 in Iran (Yousefi, 2003).

## Results

Independent t-student test was employed to test the differences between parenting styles in parents with and without CD adolescent. As predicted, the results indicated that the families of adolescents with CD were significantly less authoritative ( $t = 2.53$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $P < .05$ ) and were significantly more likely to use authoritarian style ( $t = 3.13$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $P < .05$ ). Therefore we can suggest that the first two hypotheses were approved. The third hypothesis, unexpectedly, was not approved ( $t = 1.12$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $P > .05$ ). Accordingly, we cannot say that the parents of CD adolescents use permissive style in their parent-child interactions (See table 1).

**Table 1 Parenting styles for adolescents with and without CD**

Parenting Styles for the two groups	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive
t-test	20.53	3.15	1.12
df	58	58	58
Sig. *	( $p < .05$ ) *	( $p < .05$ ) *	( $p > .05$ )

In analysis of SES, on the basis of educational level, we found a significant difference in mothers of the two groups ( $\chi^2 = 8.48$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < .05$ ), and the fathers ( $\chi^2 = 6.8$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < .05$ ). We can suggest that the parents of CD adolescents have a lower level SES (education level).

The analysis of family members number in each groups shows that ( $\chi^2 = 3.88$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < .05$ ) there is no significant difference between the two groups.

The analysis of academic achievement in the two groups shows that ( $\chi^2 = 2.56$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $P < .05$ ) there is significant difference between the two groups and the CD group has a less academic achievement.

## **Discussion**

Generally, as the related literature shows the familial factors have an important role on CD development (Kauffman, 2005). Among different factors, parenting style has a crucial contribution (Hill, 2002). The present study found that families of CD adolescents are less authoritative, and more authoritarian. No significant difference was observed for permissiveness. These findings are in agreement with

some similar findings on disruptive disorders in Iran (Alizadeh & Andries, 2002; Alizadeh, Applequist, & Coolidge, in press).

Coercive and hostile parenting as some features of authoritarian parenting has been reported to have relation with conduct disorder. These findings support that hostile and coercive parenting is important in maintenance and possibly the origins of CD (Hill, 2002; Tremblay et al, 2004).

Consistent with Kochanska and Aksan's findings (1995), our findings stress that a cluster of parental positive control strategies, such as reasoning, compromise or polite request (features of authoritativeness) correlates positively with child compliance, and negatively with child non-compliance and resistance.

Therefore, in clinical settings, we recommend examining the parenting styles of parents whose children have CD, and bolstering both the fathers' and mothers' authoritativeness in dealing with their children. The finding that the use of corporal punishment (authoritarian) was greater in the families with CD adolescents was alarming. It has been well demonstrated that corporal punishment tends to be immediately effective in changing a child's behavior. However, it has also been demonstrated that once punishment ceases, children often return to their previous behavior, punishment does not help to establish new, desired behaviors, and punishment may be socially

heritable, that is, children may model their parents' behavior when they become parents themselves (Coolidge, 1998). Thus it may be helpful for therapists to make parents aware of the repercussions of corporal punishment, and, at the very least, to help them develop parenting styles that involve rewards and reinforcement, as well. Our findings also stress on developing prevention and parent education programs. Improvements in negative parenting, stimulation for learning, and child social competence support the potential of the intervention to prevent later conduct problems in high-risk children.

The present findings must be interpreted in light of limitations such as limited sample size, limiting the study to middle-class parents, and using educational level as SES. Also, the role of child's disorder in influencing parental styles and monitoring should not be ignored. It seems that there exists both interactional and general association between CD and environmental psychosocial factors such as parenting, attachment difficulties, and home environment, which also likely correlates with higher risk of biological vulnerability (Barnow, Schuckit, Lucht, John, & Freyberger, 2002; Campbell, 1990). In fact, we should suggest that as parenting and familial factors play a role in disruptive disorders including CD development and continuation (Hill, 2002), on the other hand, the child's condition can influence on the familial control and rearing mechanisms (Barkley, 1998).

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