

## The study comparing parenting styles of children with ADHD and normal children

Mahboobeh Firouzkouhi Moghaddam, Marzeyeh Assareh,  
Amirhossein Heidaripoor, Raheleh Eslami Rad, Masoud Pishjoo

### Summary

**Aim.** Attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder is one of the most often diagnosed psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents based on hyperactivity, attention deficit and impulsivity criteria. This disorder causes a lot of problems at home, school and social situations. Considering the family and parenting factors in growth and development of ADHD children, the parenting interventions are considered as a primary intervention program for these children. Parenting management training, based on social learning models, is an effective and practical way for treatment of children with incongruent behavior. In this study, we evaluate parenting styles of ADHD children and normal children.

**Methods.** This study was conducted in Zahedan in 2012. Subjects aged 7 to 12. They were divided into patient and normal groups. Parenting styles were evaluated with Baumrind's questionnaire. The data were analyzed with SPSS ver.18.

**Results.** The findings showed that the parents of ADHD children have lower permissive score than the normal group, but authoritarian score was lower in the normal group. The authoritative score has no significant difference between the two groups. In addition, age, gender, and parent's education affected the parenting styles.

**Discussion.** The present study indicates that parents with ADHD children have different parenting styles; and factors like gender and parents education are influential in parenting methods. This finding was also present in some past surveys. Many studies have shown that teaching-parenting styles to parents with ADHD children improves the inner family relationship.

**Conclusion.** The results indicated that parents of children with ADHD are less permissive but more authoritarian in their parenting.

ADHD / parenting styles / parents

---

Mahboobeh Firouzkouhi Moghaddam<sup>1</sup>, Marzeyeh Assareh<sup>2</sup>, Amirhossein Heidaripoor<sup>3</sup>, Raheleh Eslami Rad<sup>4</sup>, Masoud Pishjoo<sup>5</sup>: <sup>1</sup>Research Center for Children and Adolescents Health (RCCA) – Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Iran; <sup>2</sup>Alborz University of Medical Science, Karaj, Iran; <sup>3</sup>General Practitioner, Zahedan, Iran; <sup>4</sup> Education Organization of Zahedan, Zahedan, Iran; <sup>5</sup>Medical Student, Research Center, Zahedan University of Medical Science, Zahedan, Iran. **Correspondence address:** masoud.pishjoo@gmail.com

### INTRODUCTION

Attention Deficit – Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a common psychiatric disorder that affects approximately 3 to 5% of school children [1]. This disorder is a set of symptom which includes hyperactivity, attention deficit and impulsive behavior. ADHD is chronic disorder that lasts from childhood to adulthood. The studies

show that 3 to 5% of children meet ADHD diagnostic criteria [2]. In most cases, this disorder is associated with some problems such as stubbornness, disobedience to parents, behavioral problems and learning failure [3]. Although psychological factors may play a role in this disorder, the role of parents, especially mothers is important in the etiology of this disorder. The mothers of these children are more rigorous or completely abandoning. Currently, the most effective method of treatment for these children is a multifaceted program, including treatment with methylphenidate and family therapy or behavioral parent training and education programs in schools and teaching coping skills [4]. In addition, the study of disturbance in the relationship between the children with ADHD and their parents is a crucial issue [5]. Wrong ways of parenting lead to make harsh and furious reactions. Because ADHD children cause activity, attention, and education problems, their parents interact cruelly with them [6].

Parent-child interactions are often affected by many factors, including emotional instability, behavioral disturbances, parent-child conflict, and parenting styles [7]. Treating with dysfunctional discipline by parents, worse child treatment outcome could be predicted [8]. Previous studies have shown that children irresponsibility and poor parenting skills may worsen ADHD symptoms [9].

In a meta-analysis, it has been reported that behavioral parenting therapy is an effective intervention to improve children behavior, parenting behavior, and parental perception of children with ADHD [10]. Parent education can also improve parent's ability to solve problems with ADHD children and adolescent [11].

Due to above mentioned facts, parenting has an important role in improving the performance of children with ADHD and their families. Therefore in this study we compared the parenting style of parents of children with ADHD and normal children. Our final goal was to express differences of parenting styles between the two groups. When a parenting style in parents of children with ADHD is determined, we can correct the wrong parenting style and thus symptoms will be improved.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

This case-control study – was conducted in two groups, parents of children with ADHD (n = 75) and parents of healthy children (n = 75). The study was implemented in Baharan psychiatric center, Zahedan, Iran, in 2012. Children with ADHD were selected from among children of 7 to 12 years old who were referred to this center. Patient and control groups in terms of age and gender were not significantly different. A child psychiatrist performed ADHD diagnosis according to the DSM-IV-TR criteria. An exclusion criteria for the study was a proven mental illness in parent. After proving the existence of this disorder in children, the child's parents were asked to complete a questionnaire together. Baumrind's questionnaire was used to assess parenting style. This questionnaire was designed by Diana Baumrind in 1972 and it included 30 items, which evaluated three parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive styles. The questions responding pattern follows a 5 degrees Likert scale from "I totally agree" to "I totally disagree."

Baumrind parenting styles were based on two aspects of parenting that are found to be extremely important. The first was "Parental responsiveness", which refers to the degree the parent responds to the child's needs. The second was "Parental demandingness" which is the extent to which the parents expect more mature and responsible behavior from a child. Using these two dimensions, she recognized three different parenting styles:

1. Authoritarian: the authoritarian parenting style is characterized by high demandingness with low responsiveness. The authoritarian parent is rigid, harsh, and demanding. Abusive parents usually fall in this category.

2. Permissive: this parenting style is characterized by low demandingness with high responsiveness. The permissive parent is overly responsive to the child's demands, seldom enforcing consistent rules. The "spoiled" child often has permissive parents.

3. Authoritative: this parenting style is characterized by moderate demandingness with moderate responsiveness. The authoritative parent is firm but not rigid, willing to make an excep-

tion when the situation warrants. The authoritative parent is responsive to the child's needs but not indulgent.

According to Buri's studies [12], the reliability of the questionnaire for permissive, authoritarian and authoritative parenting style is 81%, 86% and 92%. He also recognized and reported the validity of this questionnaire. Also, Malekpour reported the Iranian version of test reliability in a retest method and in a one week interval on a sample of 12 mothers for permissive style (0.69) authoritarian style (0.77), and decisive and assuring style (0.73) respectively [13]. Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study was 70%. In addition, parents of 75 healthy children were evaluated by the questionnaire together. Finally, the data were entered into SPSS ver .18 and with chi-square; test and T-test were evaluated. The demographics data of two parents are shown in Tab. 1.

**Table 1.** Demographics data of two groups

Variables		ADHD N (%)	Normal N (%)
Child Gender	Male	53 (57.6)	39 (42.4)
	Female	22 (37.9)	36 (62.1)
Child Age	7 years old	47 (77)	14 (23)
	8 years old	10 (40)	15 (60)
	9 years old	5 (23.8)	16 (76.2)
	10 years old	6 (33.3)	12 (66.7)
	11 years old	4 (25)	12 (75)
	12 years old	3 (33.3)	6 (66.7)
Parent Education*	without academic education	38 (66.7)	19 (33.3)
	with academic education	38 (40.4)	56 (59.6)

\* The parent who had higher education level is considered

**RESULTS**

Parents of 92 boys (61.3%) and 58 girls (38.7%) in this study were evaluated. Mean children age was 8.6±1.4 years. 94 parents (62.7%) had an academic education. In studies done on parenting style, permissive score in ADHD group was 27.4±4.4 and in control group was 29.0±4.2. Significant differences have been seen between the two groups (p=0.019). Authoritarian score in ADHD group was 23.5±6.1 and in

control group was 20.3±3.9. In addition, this variable had significant differences between the two groups. (p<0.001) Finally, authoritative score in ADHD group was 40.4±4.4 and in control group was 40.0±5.1. There was no significant difference between the two groups (p=0.646) (Tab. 2)

**Table 2.** Parenting style scores between two groups

Variables	ADHD (M±SD)	Normal (M±SD)	P Value
Permissive	27.4±4.4	29.0±4.2	0.019
Authoritarian	23.5±6.1	20.3±3.9	<0.001
Authoritative	40.4±4.4	40.0±5.1	0.646

Taking into account genders, permissive score in ADHD group was lower than control group but there was no significant statistical difference between the two groups (males p=0.125, females p=0.069). In addition, authoritarian score in ADHD group was higher than in the control group, and there was a significant statistical difference between the two groups (males p=0.003, females p=0.018). In authoritative score, no significant statistical difference between the two groups was seen (males p=0.784, females p=0.616)

Among parents of children with ADHD, parenting style were not different between two genders (permissive p=0.752, authoritarian p=0.757, authoritative p=0.343) (Tab. 3)

In parents without academic education, permissive score in ADHD group was lower than in control group and there was significant statistical difference between the two groups (p=0.045) Also in parents with academic education, permissive score in ADHD group was lower than in control group but there was no significant statis-

**Table 3.** Parenting style scores between two genders

Variables	Male			Female		
	ADHD (M±SD)	Normal (M±SD)	P Value	ADHD (M±SD)	Normal (M±SD)	P Value
Permissive	27.5±4.7	28.9±3.9	0.125	27.1±3.7	29.3±4.5	0.069
Authoritarian	23.8±6.3	20.5±3.8	0.003	23.0±5.5	19.9±3.9	0.018
Authoritative	40.7±4.0	40.4±4.3	0.784	39.6±5.4	40.3±4.9	0.616

tical difference between the two groups (p=0.35) Both parents without and with academic education had higher authoritarian score in ADHD group (without p=0.018, with p=0.036) Finally, having or not having an academic education

did not affect the authoritative score (without  $p=0.112$ , with  $p=0.606$ ) (Tab. 4)

**Table 4.** Parenting style scores without and with academic education

Variables	without academic education			with academic education		
	ADHD (M±SD)	Normal (M±SD)	P Value	ADHD (M±SD)	Normal (M±SD)	P Value
Permissive	26.4±4.6	28.9±3.9	0.045	28.3±4.1	29.1±4.3	0.351
Authoritarian	25.3±6.6	21.8±4.0	0.018	21.8±5.0	19.8±3.8	0.036
Authoritative	39.2±4.8	36.8±5.5	0.112	41.5±3.7	41.1±4.5	0.606

Among parents of children with ADHD, in parents with academic education permissive score ( $p=0.16$ ) and authoritative score ( $p=0.029$ ) were higher than in parents without academic education.

## DISCUSSION

Education and Parenting is one of the most important factors affecting the development and stability of children's behavioral problems that has been already considered [14]. Baumrind suggests introduction of parenting style based on accountability [15]. Research results show that ADHD children are more negative and are often opinionated and authoritarian and show fewer tendencies to solving problem [16, 17].

Our results indicated that parents of children with ADHD are less permissive but more authoritarian on their parenting. Authoritative parenting style of parents of ADHD children and other parents is similar. Gender has no impact on the style of parenting but parents of ADHD children with higher education are more permissive and authoritative in their parenting. In addition, parents of children with ADHD that has lower education in comparison with parents of healthy children were more permissive. These findings indicate that families with ADHD children and adolescents deal with poor family support and more disturbances in behaviors and relations. In authoritarian parenting style, the parent is demanding but not responsive. This style of parenting is characterized by high expectations and compliance to parental rules and directions. Verbal communication is one-sided and lacking in emotional content. Authoritarian parents often do not provide proof when ap-

plying commands. As a result, these children are isolated individuals, sad, vulnerable and cautious. Also in our study parents of ADHD children were less permissive, this means these parents exert greater control over their children and have a high expectation from them. All of this can be facilitator factors in the worsening of symptoms in children and adolescents with ADHD.

The results of our study confirm previous studies such as by Keown [9], McCleary [11] Yousefia [13], Anastopoulos [17] and Baker [18]. Previous research have also demonstrated that parents of children with ADHD use punishment to control their hyperactive children, more than the others do; that increases the use of authoritarian methods in parenting their children. In addition, permissive parenting style was lower than in other parents. These results were consistent with Barkley [15] view according to which parents of children with ADHD have a negative, strict and critical behaviors response to problems with these children. Finally, several studies have suggested that parenting style training to parents of children with ADHD improves relationships within the family. It is important to mention that Keown [9], McCleary [11] indicated differences between the genders and the impact on parenting, which was not confirmed in our study.

The results indicated that parents of children with ADHD has less permissive but more authoritarian parenting styles. Therefore, according to previous studies on parenting style of ADHD parents, this style of parenting can lead to worsening of ADHD symptoms, so improving parenting styles with family therapy, behavioral parent training, education programs in schools, and teaching coping skills can improve quality of life and relationships in families with ADHD children.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** *Hereby, we highly appreciate all colleagues in the Education Organization of Zahedan, who have been working on this project.*

## REFERENCES

1. American Psychiatric Association Proposed Revision: Definition of a Mental Disorder Retrieved December 20; 2011
2. Waslick B, Greenhill I. Attention deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder. In Wiener J.M, Dulcan M.K. Textbook of child & adolescent psychiatry from American psychiatry publishing Inc. 2004 (third edition): 485- 501.
3. Weiss M, Wiess G. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. In Lewis M. Comprehensive textbook of child and adolescent psychiatry from Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. 2007 (fourth edition): 430-454.
4. Kaplan & Sadocks. Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder. In Synopsis of Psychiatry. 2007, Tenth edition: 1206- 1217.
5. Terry C, Chi, Stephen P. Mother-Child Relationships of Children with ADHD: The Role of Maternal Depressive Symptoms and Depression-Related Distortions Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology. 2002; 30(4): 387-400.
6. Wiener S. Textbook of child & Adolescent psychiatry. 2004 3ed Philadelphia: Saunders: 390-450.
7. Gau SS, Chang JP. Maternal parenting styles and mother-child relationship among adolescents with and without persistent attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Res Dev Disabil. 2013 May; 34(5): 1581-94.
8. Hoza B, Owens JS, Pelham WE, Swanson J M, Conners C K, Hinshaw S, et al. Parent cognitions as predictors of child treatment response in attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology 2000; 28: 569-583.
9. Keown LJ, Woodward LJ. Early parent-child relations and family functioning of preschool boys with pervasive hyperactivity. J Abnorm Child Psychol 2002; 30: 541-553.
10. Lee PC, Niew WI, Yang HJ, Chen VC, Lin KC. A meta-analysis of behavioral parent training for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Res Dev Disabil. 2012 Nov-Dec; 33(6): 2040-9.
11. McCleary L, Ridley T. Parenting adolescents with ADHD: evaluation of a psychoeducation group. Patient Educ Couns. 1999 Sep; 38(1): 3-10.
12. Buri JR. Parental authority questionnaire. J Pers Assess. 1991 Aug; 57(1): 110-9.
13. Yousefia SH, Soltani Far A, Abdolahian E. Parenting stress and parenting styles in mothers of ADHD with mothers of normal children. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences. 2011; 30: 1666 – 1671.
14. Conger RD, Conger KJ, Elder GH Jr, et al. A family process model of economic Hardship and adjustment of early adolescent boys. Child Dev 1992; 63(3): 526-541.
15. Baumrind D. The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance abuse. Journal of Early Adolescence 1991; 11: 56-95.
16. Barkley RA, Fischer M, Edelbrock C, Smallish L. The adolescent outcome of hyperactive children diagnosed by research criteria, I: An 8 year prospective follow-up study. Journal of the American Academy of child and adolescent psychiatry 1990; 29: 546-557.
17. Anastopoulos AD, Guevremont DC, Shelton TL, DuPaul GJ. Parenting stress among families of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. J Abnorm Child Psychol. 1992 Oct; 20(5): 503-520.
18. Baker DB. Parenting stress and ADHD: A comparison of mothers and fathers. Journal of Emotional & Behavioral Disorders 1994; 2(1): 46-51