

PARENTING PRACTICES AND THEIR ROLES IN ANXIETY AMONG YOUTH AND ADULTS

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Abstract

Objectives. The study aimed to identify the impact of parental practices on the anxiety of young people and adults, and to examine how the anxiety associated with parental practices perceived during childhood varies depending on respondents' current status, operationalized by whether they have or have not assumed parental roles.

Material and methods. The method used was an indirect survey applied to 247 respondents, and the research instrument used was a questionnaire through which the three research variables were measured.

Results. Perceptions of threats and punishments as parenting practices by youth and adults are not associated with prospective and inhibitory anxiety. Perceptions of guilt-inducing criticism as parenting practices by youth and adults are associated with prospective anxiety but are not related to inhibitory anxiety. Threats and punishments perceived from parents during childhood do not vary depending on the parent with whom the respondent established a close relationship.

Conclusions. Negative parenting practices that included punishments and threats during childhood were not associated with prospective and inhibitory anxiety in adolescence or adulthood. Guilt-inducing criticisms, addressed by parents in early childhood, were associated with prospective anxiety in adolescence or adulthood. The results indicated that there was no link between young people's and adults' perception of parenting practices during childhood and the parents with whom they had a closer relationship. The statistical analyses showed that young people and adults who do not have parental status exhibited higher level of prospective and inhibitory anxiety compared to those who are parents.

Keywords: harmful parenting practice; prospective anxiety; inhibitory anxiety; parental roles.

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Introduction

The activity of being a parent, conceptually presented under the term parenting, involves two domains of development: the physical domain (biological growth) and the psychological domain, operationalized through the following areas: cognitive, emotional, and social (Pânișoară, 2022). Parenting education helps parents improve their parenting skills, reducing the tensions fulfilling the parental. Parental support contributes to the development of the parent's ability to draw on resources outside the family to ensure their own well-being as well as that of their children (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011).

Parenting practices and their role in raising a child

Parenting practices are behaviors that shape useful skills in various contexts. For example, to achieve school success, parents can adopt practices of monitoring homework, organizing a space dedicated to reading, purchasing books, participating in school events, collaborating with the teacher, and so forth. Unlike the previously defined parental practices, parental style refers to the emotional climate in which parents raise and educate their children (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

After numerous studies, Baumrind (1978), cited in Spera (2005), identified three main parental styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. In the authoritative style, parents are warm and responsive to children's needs, offering affection and demonstrating support for their interests. The authoritarian parental style is characterized by parents' high expectations for children's maturity, strictness, and low for selfishness or mistakes. In the permissive style, parents are negligent in setting maturity standards and tend to be dismissive or unconcerned with supporting the development of children's skills. Parental neglect poses a risk to a child's developmental lifespan. Children raised and educated by such parents experience severe deficiencies in understanding emotions, including both recognizing them and relating emotions to the context in which they occur. These difficulties arise because neglectful parents typically lack emotional expressiveness and do not provide support in helping children articulate and manage their own emotions.

One of the goals of parents is to ensure the happiness of their children, but paradoxically, the setting of this goal is associated with parents' tendency to solve problems instead of preparing children to do it themselves, to the emergence of anxiety. It is recommended to encourage children to view failure or disappointment as learning opportunities and not to minimize these situations in exchange for immediate "victories" (Kennedy, 2022), but also to adopt parenting practices based on problem-solving. These practices involve gradually granting independence, differentiating negotiable from non-negotiable problems, involving the child/adolescent in solving negotiable problems, maintaining effective communication, but also developing reasonable expectations (Barkley & Robin, 2008).

To prevent anxiety, Smith et al. (2005) recommend the application of effective discipline that involves the transition of children from dependence and external control to internalization, and the ability to take initiative and be socially responsible. The implementation of this discipline requires parental warmth and involvement, clear communication and expectations, the establishment of rational consequences so that children understand why a behavior is appropriate or not, the formulation of age-appropriate rules, limits, and requirements for children to internalize, and the consistent application of parenting practices and consequences.

The effects of anxiety on child development

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical periods of development and transition, and the onset of anxiety symptoms is often overlooked, as these symptoms are frequently considered

a natural part of this stage. Because of the major physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes adolescents and young adults undergo, they are particularly susceptible to developing anxiety disorders. Factors such as gender, parental stress, parental anxiety and depression, and alcohol and tobacco use are also associated with anxiety disorders (Mondin et al., 2013). In addition, uncertainty about a potential future threat disrupts an individual's ability to avoid it or mitigate its negative impact, generating anxiety (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013).

Anxiety disorders form a group of mental disorders characterized by excessive fear, avoidance of perceived threats (Penninx et al., 2021), including the following symptoms: cognitive (such as fear of losing control, fear of physical injury or death, hypervigilance to threats, and fear of negative evaluation by others), physiological symptoms (e.g. increased heart rate, palpitations, shortness of breath, and weakness), behavioral symptoms (escape, the seeking of safety and reassurance, restlessness, and agitation), and affective symptoms including restlessness, tension, agitation, frustration (Chand & Marwaha, 2023).

Anxiety disorders include separation anxiety disorder, selective mutism, specific phobias, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, agoraphobia, and generalized anxiety disorder. These conditions often begin during childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood (Craske & Stein, 2017), and significantly impact quality of life and psychosocial functioning (Mendlowicz & Stein, 2000).

The manifestations of anxiety disorders are varied. For some people, anxiety is related to specific stimuli in the environment that become sources for various phobias. Others may experience severe episodic discomfort such as panic disorder. Since the prefrontal cortex and amygdala perceive these experiences as threats, a fight-or-flight response may be triggered, often manifesting in dizziness, increased heart rate, and profuse sweating (Javaid et al., 2023).

An individual's early experiences of diminished control in various situations may be associated with a cognitive style that increases the likelihood of perceiving subsequent events as uncontrollable, thereby elevating the risk of developing anxiety (Chorpita & Barlow, 1998).

From the perspective of anxiety types, social anxiety affects an individual's functioning across various areas of life, making them more vulnerable to bullying and contributing to diminished interpersonal skills (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020). Inhibitory anxiety, unlike prospective anxiety, is not significantly correlated with life satisfaction, whereas individuals who tend to focus on future events in order to prepare for potential threats have been shown to be less satisfied with their lives (Maftai & Lăzărescu, 2022). Future-oriented (prospective) anxiety is negatively associated with psychological flexibility and cognitive reappraisal, and it contributes to expressive suppression, depression and elevated stress levels (Oztekin et al., 2025).

Material and methods

The specific objectives of this research were as follows:

- O1. To identify the role of parenting practices in the anxiety of young people and adults.
- O2. To examine how young people and adults perceived parenting practices depending on the parent with whom they had a closer relationship.
- O3. To assess respondents' levels of anxiety based on their parental status.

Research hypotheses

H1. Perceptions of negative parenting practices are associated with anxiety in youth and adults.

H2. Negative perceptions of parenting practices vary depending on the parent with whom youth and adults had a closer relationships.

H3. There is a significant difference in negative perceptions of parenting practices, depending on the parent with whom a closer relationships has been established.

Participants

The sample for this research consisted of 247 respondents, 226 (91%) female, 20 (8%) male, and 1 respondent who did not state their gender. Respondents' age ranged from under 20 years old to over 45 years old, the predominant ones being represented by under 20 years old in the case of 38 respondents (15%), 21-25 years old for 69 respondents (28%), and over 45 years in the case of 44 respondents (18%).

Procedure

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bucharest (no. 92/10.03.2022).

Data for the present study were collected online by distributing the form in a virtual format, primarily through social media groups. There were no exclusion criteria for; data were also collected from respondents of adult age. Regardless of the respondent's age, each participant was instructed to complete the retrospective questionnaire about their relationship with their parents, particularly during childhood. Participants provided informed and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. In addition to completing the instruments, they were also asked to provide basic demographic information (age and gender). The collected data were then processed using an Excel database and statistically analyzed with the Jamovi program.

Instruments

To measure the level of parental support experienced by respondents, the Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (P-PASS), validated by Mageau et al. (2015), was used. The scale is composed of 24 items distributed in 6 factors as follows: Factor 1 – Freedom within certain limits; Factor 2 – Argumentation of requirements and limits; Factor 3 – Recognition of feelings; Factor 4 – Threats and punishments; Factor 5 – Performance under pressure; Factor 6 – Guilt-inducing criticism. The responses are provided on a five-step Likert scale ranging from 1 – To a very small extent to 5 – To a very large extent. Factor 4 - Threats and punishments and Factor 6 - Guilt-inducing criticism were used in this study.

To measure the level of prospective and inhibitory anxiety, the Uncertainty Scale-Short form (IUS-S) Carleton et al. (2007) was used. The scale is composed of 12 items. The responses are measured on a five-step Likert scale, ranging from 1 – To a very small extent to 5 – To a very large extent.

The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha coefficients - α) in the present study were: $\alpha = .83$ ($M = 2.64$, $SD = .48$) for the Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (P-PASS), $\alpha = .92$ ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .85$) for Uncertainty Scale-Short form (IUS-S). According to Taber (2018), the reported value signifies reliable, respectively strong internal consistency.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The means, standard deviations, standard error, minimum, maximum, skewness, and kurtosis for each variable are presented in Table 1. The value of skewness varies between 0.10 and 0.45, and the value of kurtosis varies between -1.19 and -0.20 (Table 1). Both ranges are statistically acceptable (Mishra et al., 2019). Therefore, after the normality of the research variables was analyzed, all skewness and kurtosis values were found within an acceptable range.

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of the variables Threats and punishments, Guilt-inducing criticism, Prospective anxiety and Inhibitory anxiety

	Threats and punishments	Guilt-inducing criticism	Prospective anxiety	Inhibitory Anxiety
Number of respondents	247	247	247	247
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	7.11	6.56	19.04	13.18
Median	7	6	19	13
Standard deviation	2.37	2.28	6.03	4.86
Minimum	4	4	7	5
Maximum	12	12	34	25
Skewness	0.10	0.44	0.12	0.45
Std. error skewness	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15
Kurtosis	-1.19	-0.96	-0.52	-0.20
Std. error kurtosis	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31

Identifying the relationship between the perception of negative parenting practices and anxiety in youth and adults

The relationship between the perception of negative parenting practices and the anxiety of young people and adults was examined through a correlation analysis between practices such as threats and punishments and guilt-inducing criticism used by parents during childhood, and the levels of prospective and inhibitory anxiety reported by the study participants. Parenting practices involving threats and punishments, as perceived by young people and adults, were not associated with either prospective anxiety ($r = .12$, $p = .054$, $p > .05$) or inhibitory anxiety ($r = .00$, $p = .98$, $p > .05$) (Table 2).

Table 2

Correlation analysis between parenting practices that include threats and punishments and anxiety in youth and adults

		Threats and punishments	Prospective anxiety	Inhibitory Anxiety
Threats and punishments	Pearson's r	—		
	df	—		
	p-value	—		
Prospective anxiety	Pearson's r	0.12	—	
	df	245	—	
	p-value	0.054	—	
Inhibitory Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.00	0.75	—
	df	245	245	—
	p-value	0.986	<.001	—

Guilt-inducing parenting practices, as perceived by youth and adults were associated with prospective anxiety ($r = .15, p = .01, p < .05$), but not with inhibitory anxiety ($r = .07, r = .26, p > .05$) (Table 3).

Table 3

Correlation analysis between guilt-inducing parenting practices and anxiety in youth and adults

		Guilt-inducing critics	Prospective anxiety	Inhibitory Anxiety
Guilt-inducing critics	Pearson's r	—		
	Degrees of freedom	—		
	p-value	—		
Prospective anxiety	Pearson's r	0.15	—	
	Degrees of freedom	245	—	
	p-value	0.017	—	
Inhibitory Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.07	0.75	—
	Degrees of freedom	245	245	—
	p-value	0.268	<.001	—

Identifying the link between negative perceptions of parenting practices and the parent with whom adults and youth had closer relationships

To identify how the perception of negative parenting practices varies depending on the relationship established with the parents, two ANOVA analyses of variance were performed. It was found that Threats and punishments perceived from parents during childhood do not vary depending on the parent with whom the child established a close relationship ($F(2, 74.17) = .21, p = .80, p > .05$). At the sample level, 136 respondents had a closer relationship with their mother ($M = 7.20, SD = 2.38$), 29 respondents had a closer relationship with their father ($M = 7.00, SD = 2.66$), while 82 respondents reported having close relationships with both parents ($M = 7.00, SD = 2.28$) (Table 4)

Table 4

ANOVA analysis of variance between perceived threats and punishments by youth and adults and the parent with whom they have a close relationship

	F-test value	Degrees of freedom between groups	Degrees of freedom within the group	p-coefficient informally
Threats and punishments	0.21	2	74.17	0.809

Group Descriptive					
	The parent with whom a closer relationship was created	Number of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
Threats and punishments	Mother	136	7.20	2.38	0.20
	Father	29	7.00	2.66	0.49
	Both parents	82	7.00	2.28	0.25

Furthermore, the perception of guilt-inducing parental criticism did not vary depending on the parent with whom they have established a close relationship ($F(2, 74.75) = 1, p = .37, p > .05$). At the sample level, 136 respondents had a closer relationship with their mother ($M = 6.74, SD = 2.33$), 29 respondents had a closer relationship with their father ($M = 6.45, SD = 2.53$), and 82 respondents reported having a close relationship with both parents ($M = 6.30, SD = 2.11$) (Table 5).

Table 5

ANOVA analysis of variance between guilt-inducing criticism perceived by youth and adults and the parent with whom they have a close relationship

	F-test value	Degrees of freedom between groups	Degrees of freedom within the group	p-coefficient informally
Guilt-inducing criticism	1.00	2	74.75	0.373

Group Descriptive					
	The parent with whom a closer relationship was created	Number of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
Guilt-inducing criticism	Mother	136	6.74	2.33	0.20
	Father	29	6.45	2.53	0.47
	Both parents	82	6.30	2.11	0.23

Identifying the level of anxiety according to the status of the respondents

To determine how the status of the respondents influences the level of anxiety, statistical T-tests were performed. A statistically significant difference ($t = -3.44$, $p < .001$) was identified between the variance of the means of prospective anxiety of respondents with parental status ($N = 113$, $M = 17.64$, $SD = 5.32$) and those without parental status ($N = 134$, $M = 20.23$, $SD = 6.35$) as a result of the parenting practices to which they were exposed during childhood (Table 6).

Table 6

T-test of variance of prospective anxiety according to respondents' status

		Statistic	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Mean difference	Standard Error of the Difference	Effect Size
Prospective anxiety	Student's t	-3.44	245.00	<.001	-2.59	0.75	Cohen's d -0.44

Group Descriptive						
	Group	Number of respondents	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Standard error
Prospective anxiety	Respondents who have parental status	113	17.64	17.00	5.32	0.50
	Respondents who do not have parental status	134	20.23	20.50	6.35	0.55

A statistically significant difference ($t = -2.32$, $p = .02$, $p < .05$) was identified between the variance of the means of inhibitory anxiety of respondents with parental status ($N = 113$, $M = 12.41$, $SD = 4.51$) and those without parental status ($N = 134$, $M = 13.84$, $SD = 5.06$) as a result of the parenting practices to which they were exposed during childhood (Table 7).

Table 7

T-test of the variance of inhibitory anxiety according to the status of the respondents

		Statistic	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Mean difference	Standard Error of the Difference	Effect Size
Inhibitory Anxiety	Student's t	-2.32	245.00	0.021	-1.43	0.61	Cohen's d -0.30

Group Descriptive

	Group	Number of respondents	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Standard error
Inhibitory Anxiety	Respondents who have parental status	113	12.41	12.00	4.51	0.42
	Respondents who do not have parental status	134	13.84	14.00	5.06	0.44

Discussion

The present study examined the role played by parental practices, as perceived by youth and adults during childhood, on prospective and inhibitory anxiety. The results obtained agree with a series of studies, such as the study by Erozkan (2012), which concluded that perceived parental pressure during adolescence is associated with increased risks of developing anxiety throughout the individual's life, while parental warmth contributes to the acquisition of positive coping mechanisms, reducing the risk of developing anxiety.

At the same time, excessive parenting, involving risk aversion and anticipatory problem-solving by the parent in order to protect the child, was likely to lead to the use of dysfunctional coping strategies that are present even in adulthood (Segrin et al., 2013).

Childhood maltreatment (e.g., childhood sexual abuse), physical punishment, a parental history of mental disorders, low socioeconomic status, and an overprotective or overly harsh parenting style are associated with an increased risk of developing anxiety disorders (Craske & Stein, 2017). At the same time, Ciurbea et al. (2025) concluded that domestic violence, parent-child conflict, substance abuse, and lack of self-control are risk factors for adolescents, leading to the formation of dysfunctional behavior, often associated with the development of anxiety.

Emotional neglect in childhood, including rejection, criticism, and negative interaction with parents, is associated with the development of anxiety disorders in adolescence and adulthood. At the same time, emotional neglect contributes to the emergence of internal patterns of anxious and insecure attachment, based on the fear of rejection and separation in the child, negatively influencing the establishment of future relationships (Schimmenti & Bifulco, 2015).

The development of a young person's or adult's ability to understand emotions depends on both internal factors (cognitive and affective skills) and external factors (the role of parents, the environment, relationships with others). Thus, parents serve as partners in communication with the child and play a major role in shaping their social development, becoming a starting point for the changes that occur in development - both in terms of performance in various contexts and behavioral adjustments, especially during adolescence. These changes have long-term effects that extend into adulthood (Bukhalenkova et al., 2021; Pavarini et al., 2012).

Children need care that supports their emotional health and well-being, as well as positive discipline, which helps them develop the ability to cope with stressful situations, overcome fears, and manage disappointment and frustration. As parents become more supportive in the process of

raising and educating their children, the risk of internalizing negative behaviors associated with anxiety, depression, and difficulties in social adaptation decreases (Osofsky & Fitzgerald, 2000). Parents' calm attitude, attention to tone of voice, and use of facial expressions adapted to the child's behavior represent parenting practices that strengthen children's emotional health and reduce the risk of anxiety (Kazdin & Rotella, 2014).

Conclusion

Considering the first objective of the study - *identifying the role of parenting practices in the anxiety in youth and adults* - the data analysis showed that negative parenting practices that included punishments and threats during childhood were not associated with either prospective or inhibitory anxiety in adolescence or adulthood. However, guilt-inducing criticism directed by parents in early childhood, was associated with prospective anxiety in adolescence or adulthood. This may reflect a defense mechanism developed by the youth or adults to avoid experiencing guilt. No association was found between parental criticism and respondents' levels of inhibitory anxiety.

For the second objective - examining how young people and adults perceived parenting practices depending on the parent with whom they had a closer relationship - the results indicated that there was no link between young people's and adults' perception of parenting practices during childhood and the parents with whom they had a closer relationship. Although the three groups on which the ANOVA analysis of variance was performed differed in terms of the number of respondents, there were no significant differences in the variance of the perception of negative parenting practices.

Regarding the third objective - *assessing respondents' levels of anxiety based on their parental status* - the statistical analyses performed demonstrated that young people and adults who did not have parental status were characterized by higher levels of prospective and inhibitory anxiety in comparison to those who were parents. Although the differences in the mean values of the two types of anxiety were not large between the two groups, they were statistically significant. These results may be due to the fact that respondents had not yet developed the necessary skills to cope with difficult situations. The parental role, characterized by numerous challenges and uncertainties, may also provide opportunities to improve how individuals difficulties, given the increased sense of responsibility it entails.

In conclusion, the study suggests that parental practices applied during childhood have long-term effects, influencing how individuals relate to different contexts, adapt to the society in which they live, and how they eventually exercise their own parental roles.

Limits and future directions

The main limitation of the study is the self-reporting of responses, which reduces the authors' ability to verify their veracity. Another limitation concerns the lack of heterogeneity in the sample with respect to the parent with whom respondents reported to having a close relationship. This limitation caused the difficulty of formulating a conclusion regarding the variation of anxiety in youth and adults depending on the parent-child relationship.

A future direction for reducing anxiety in youth and adults stemming from perceived parental practices during childhood would be to implement a training program that provides both parental education and parental support, emphasizing the impact of parental behaviors used in the early stages of child development on children's later evolution.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests

Ethics Committee Approval

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bucharest (no. 92/10.03.2022).

Consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained electronically before completing the questionnaire, and subjects were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage, and that data protection and processing would be carried out in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

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