

Original Paper

The Influence of Parental Anxious Rearing on Child Depression: The Moderating Effect of Self-Competence

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Abstract

This study explored the relationship between parental anxiety and depression in children, and studied the moderating role of children's self-competence. Through a series of research tools, the anxious rearing, children's depression and children's self-competence are studied respectively. The results show that anxious rearing can significantly predict children's depression, and self-competence can alleviate this effect.

Keywords

Anxious rearing, depression, self-esteem, self-competence

1. Introduction

Depression, as a negative emotion, is mainly manifested as low mood, loss of interest, mental exhaustion, decreased self-evaluation, pessimistic disappointment about the future, feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness etc. (Gong et al., 2020). Depressive symptoms have become an important public health problem affecting the physical and mental health of children and adolescents in the 21st century (Zhou & He, 2003). Depression in children and adolescents not only affects their normal learning, interpersonal relationships, behavior choices, and life satisfaction, but is also closely related to substance abuse, aggression and even suicidal behavior (Wang, Zheng, & Liu, 2009). A large number of studies have shown that negative parenting styles are significantly associated with an increase in anxiety and depression symptoms (Zlomke & Young, 2009).

Studies have shown that negative parenting styles are significantly associated with an increase in anxiety and depression symptoms (Zlomke, & Young, 2009). A study in the United States found that adolescents who were controlled and anxiously nurtured by their parents during their childhood reported a higher frequency of symptoms of anxiety and depression. Muris, P. (2002) found that there is a significant relationship between parental anxiety and overprotection and adolescent depression. Anxious rearing can significantly predict the occurrence of depressive symptoms. Anxious rearing refers to parents worrying about their children's safety, possible dangers and overprotective behaviors (Flett et al., 2002). The perfectionist anxious parenting model believes (Mitchell, Broeren & Newall et al., 2013), the perfectionist tendency of children is their response to the anxious rearing of their parents. Children who accept this kind of parenting will receive strong attention from their parents and dare not make mistakes, so they become accustomed to becoming self-denying, doubting their value, and eventually developing perfectionist tendencies. Studies have shown that the negative components of perfectionism are negatively related to self-esteem (Yang, Zhu, Zhai, Li, & Li, 2011) and positively related to depression (Liu, Zhu, Deng, Li, & Yang, 2013). The higher the tendency of individual perfectionism, the higher the level of depression. Because they believe that anxious rearing will prompt children to focus on the negative consequences of mistakes and failures, and this failure is beyond the scope of children's ability, so it is difficult for children to get rid of depression.

However, not all children undergoing anxious rearing experience symptoms of depression (Carris, 1998; DeRubeis, 2005; Yang & Clum, 1996). Studies have shown that some people can quickly adapt to emergencies in life and restore normal mental functions within a quick adjustment period (Bonanno, 2004; Rutter, 1993; Wu, 2011). This shows that although children may be affected by parental parenting, there may also be other individual factors that prevent children's depression. Among individual factors, a high level of self-esteem is considered to have an important role in promoting children's mental health. According to the stress-buffering model (Cohen & Wills, 1985), although anxious parenting is a risk factor for development, high self-esteem can be used as a protective factor to reduce depression in children receiving anxious rearing. Diathesis-stress Model believes that individuals who carry a certain "risk" or "vulnerability" gene are more likely to show certain mental illness or behavioral problems when they are disadvantaged (Belsky, 1997). From this perspective, anxious rearing is a risk factor that can exacerbate depression in children with low self-esteem.

Self-esteem, as a value evaluation of oneself, includes two aspects: intrinsic value evaluation and instrumental value evaluation. These two aspects are respectively expressed as self-liking and self-competence. Self-competence means that children show successful behaviors and abilities in activities such as games, sports, learning, and communication, and obtain praise from others for their academic and sports abilities, thereby proving that they are successful and getting a positive experience of self-worth (Yang & Zhang, 2005). A study of senior elementary school students showed that self-competence can significantly predict depression, and enhancing self-competence can prevent

children's social anxiety and depression (Hyun & Ha, 2010).

The research of Kenneth and Zhang Xiuge found that children's perfectionism tendency caused by anxious rearing can directly affect depression, but also indirectly affect depression through self-esteem. On the one hand, when an individual always feels that there is a gap between his actual performance and the standard he wants to achieve, is dissatisfied with his own performance, and cannot accept his own shortcomings and failures, it can directly cause depression; On the other hand, the above-mentioned tendency of the individual can also reduce the overall evaluation of the individual's self-worth, importance, and ability (i.e., self-competence), thereby producing depression.

Therefore, this article aims to explore the impact of parental anxious rearing on children's depression, and to further study the role of self-competence in it. The hypothesis of this study: parental anxiety is related to children's depression. Self-competence can negatively predict children's depression. In addition, self-competence has a moderating effect between anxious rearing and children's depression.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Using online convenient sampling, 335 middle and high grade primary school students were selected from three primary schools in Huangshi City, Hubei Province. After preliminary screening, 327 valid samples were obtained, including 177 males and 150 females, with an age range of 11.79 ± 3.12 years old.

2.2 Research Tools

The tools used in this study include three aspects:

2.2.1 Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran for Children (EMBU-C)

After being revised by Muris et al. (2003), it was revised by Wang Meifang, Niu Hua, and Zhao Xiao (2018) among Chinese elementary school children. After reliability and validity tests, this questionnaire has a good standard validity. The scale reflects the individual's evaluation of parental parenting behavior, which contains a variety of parental parenting attitudes and behaviors, divided into four dimensions, namely emotional warmth, anxious parenting, rejection and overprotection, etc., with a total of 39 items. This article selects the item of parental rejection factor. A 4-point scoring is used (1=never, 4=always). The higher the score, the higher the parental rejection to upbringing. In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient of EMBU-C is 0.89.

2.2.2 Self-liking/Self-competence Scale—Revised (SLCS—R)

It was revised by Tafarodi R et al. (2001), and Wei Jia et al. (2012) made localized revisions. It has good reliability and validity among Chinese primary school students (Cao & Liu, 2017). The scale reflects an individual's self-esteem level, including two dimensions of self-liking and self-competence, with a total of 16 items. This article selects one of the self-competence factors. A 5-point scoring (1=very inconsistent, 5=very consistent) is adopted. After reverse scoring is performed on the inverse

questions, the higher the total score, the higher the child's self-competence level. The Cronbach's α coefficient in this study is 0.91.

2.2.3 Short Version of Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D₁₀)

Compiled by Andresen et al. (1994), Yang Wenhui and Xiong Ge (2016) conducted a reliability and validity test in adolescents and found that the scale has good structural validity, criterion-related validity, discriminative validity, clinical validity and reliability, the internal consistency coefficient used in normal children is 0.70 (Wang, Han, Jiang, & Liu, 2018). The scale reflects the individual's depression level, which contains three factors: positive emotions, depressive emotions, and physical symptoms, with a total of 10 items, such as "I feel lonely" and so on. The scale also adjusted the relevant items of CES-D10 to suit elementary school children, changing the "work" in each item to "learning". 4 points are used for scoring, 0 means no or very few (less than 1 day), 3 means most or all of the time (5-7 days). After scoring positive emotions in reverse, the collected data analysis. The higher the total score, the higher the child's depression level. In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient is 0.82.

2.3 Data Processing

Use SPSS23.0 data processing software package, SPSSau online data processing software and PROCESS2.16.3 plug-in to process the data.

3. Result

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics on anxious rearing, depression levels, and self-competence, the results are as follows:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Anxious Rearing, Self-competence and Child Depression

	Anxious rearing	Self-competence	Child depression
Total score	2.96±0.57	2.96±0.48	1.88±0.55
Male	3.06±0.52	2.96±0.50	1.87±0.52
Female	2.87±0.61	2.92±0.48	1.88±0.58
Only child	2.91±0.53	2.92±0.48	1.82±0.56
Non-only child	2.57±0.57	2.96±0.48	1.88±0.55

Through the analysis of variance on gender, grade, age, and only child, the results are shown in Table 1:

① The main gender effect of anxious rearing is significant, and parents' anxious parenting behavior towards boys is more serious ($F=17.22$, $P<0.001$); ②The main effect of age for anxious rearing is significant, the older the individual perceives the more anxious upbringing of parents ($F=2.51$, $P<$

0.05); ③The main effect of self-competence is significant, and children with higher grades have higher self-competence ($F=2.41, P<0.05$); ④There was no significant difference between only child and non-only child in anxious rearing, self-competence, and depression level ($F>0.35, P>0.39$).

3.2 Related Analysis

Table 2. Correlation Analysis of Anxious Rearing, Self-competence and Child Depression

	Anxious rearing	Self-competence	Children's depression
Anxious rearing	1		
Self-competence	-0.17**	1	
Children's depression	0.17**	0.06	1

It can be concluded from Table 2: ① Anxious rearing is positively correlated with the individual's depression level ($r=0.17, P<0.01$), that is, the more anxious parenting the individual feels, the higher the individual's depression level; ② Anxious rearing is negatively correlated with individual self-competence ($r=-0.17, P<0.01$), that is, the more anxious education an individual feels from parents, the lower the individual's self-competence level; ③ Self-competence has nothing to do with the level of depression, that is, no matter what level of self-competence an individual is in, there may be a tendency to depression.

3.3 The Moderating Effect of Self-competence between Parents' Anxious Rearing and Children's Depression

Firstly, centralize the data on parents' anxious education and children's self-competence, and secondly put variables into the hierarchical regression model. In Model 1, the direct effect of parental anxiety education on children's depression is analyzed without considering the effect of self-competence, ($t=-4.157, p<0.000$). This means that parents' anxiety rearing has a significant impact on children's depression; Model 2 adds self-competence as a moderating variable on the basis of the former; Model 3 adds the interactive item of parental anxiety education and self-competence, It can be seen from the table that the interaction term is significant ($t=2.147, p=0.032$).

Table 3. A Hierarchical Regression Model of Self-competence Moderation

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	1.878*** (85.068)	1.878*** (85.313)	1.871*** (84.313)
Anxious rearing	-0.161*** (-4.157)	-0.175*** (-4.461)	-0.171*** (-4.387)
Self-competence		0.099* (2.111)	0.085 (1.809)
Interactive item			0.156* (2.147)
R ²	0.028	0.035	0.042
Adjust R ²	0.026	0.032	0.038
F value□	F (1,601)=17.280, <i>p</i> <0.001	F (2,600)=10.918, <i>p</i> <0.001	F (3,599)=8.859, <i>p</i> <0.001
ΔR ²	0.028	0.007	0.007
ΔF value□	F (1,601)=17.280, <i>p</i> <0.001	F (1,600)=4.456, <i>p</i> =0.035	F (1,599)=4.610, <i>p</i> =0.032

Note: * *p*<0.05 ** *p*<0.01 *** *p*<0.001 The t value is in the parentheses

In order to further explore the role of self-competence in the regulation of anxious rearing and depressive emotions, we conducted a simple slope test. Select one standard deviation above and below the average of self-competence respectively, as high-level self-competence and low-level self-competence. The results are shown in the table. When self-competence is at a low level, anxious rearing can significantly predict children's depression; as children's self-competence improves, it has a certain buffering effect on the depression caused by anxious rearing, which is, high self-competence can relieve children's depression caused by anxious rearing.

Table 4. Simple Slope Test

Adjusted variable level	Regression coefficients	Standard error	t	p	95% CI	
Low level (-1SD)	-0.246	0.051	-4.799	<0.001	-0.347	-0.146
Average value	-0.171	0.039	-4.387	<0.001	-0.248	-0.095
High level (1SD)	-0.097	0.053	-1.817	0.07	-0.201	0.008

4. Discussion

This article mainly starts from three perspectives: self-competence, child depression, and anxious rearing, and explores the possible relationship between the three, as well as possible efforts and interventions to reduce the level of children's depression.

Studies have found that parents' anxious rearing behaviors towards boys are more serious, which is consistent with previous studies (Tao, 2013). This may be influenced by traditional Chinese family concepts. From the feudal society's men's farming and women's weaving to today's existing sayings of "men dominate the outside, women dominate the interior", all implied expectations of boys and hoped

that they would become talents. Therefore, more anxious parenting methods are used.

The self-competence of children increases with the increase of grade, which is consistent with previous studies (Liu, 2005). For children in lower grades, all abilities are still limited, and they are easy to experience their lack of ability in comparison with other broader groups of people, so they show a lower sense of self-competence. As the grade increases, the individual's self-awareness development dimensions and levels become more complicated, and the sense of self-competence also increases.

There are no significant differences in anxious rearing, self-competence, and depression levels between only children and non-only children. This conclusion is significantly different from previous studies. Previous studies have suggested that the anxious rearing, depression ratio and self-competence level received by only children are higher than those of non-only children. In this study, most non-only-child families have two children. Because of the small number of children and more resources, the family's requirements are usually met. With the development of the national economy, people's living standards are improving. Women can also get the same positive comments and encouragement from many aspects as the only child, so the difference between the only child and the non-only child is gradually shrinking.

Anxious rearing is significantly positively correlated with depression in children. Numerous literatures show that there is a significant correlation between anxious rearing and child depression (Lipps et al., 2012). The internal psychological mechanism is that anxious parenting behaviors will produce more rush, irrational, oppressive and coerced behaviors. These behaviors are not conducive to children's cognitive and behavioral development in many scenarios. When a child is under an anxious parenting condition for a long time, the child will feel strong pressure, and may show anxiety, depression, emotional instability, and poor emotional expression skills. Studies have also shown that the impact of anxious rearing on children's depression is also affected by the children's own personality characteristics or personality temperament, and children with introverted personality may show more depression. Parents of anxious upbringing often present a situation where the child's dangerous situation is too magnified, and this anxiety will be passed on to the child invisibly. A large number of studies have shown that the anxiety between mother and son and between father and son has intergenerational transmission. Anxious rearing parents tend to ignore or reject the needs of the child in the process of interacting with them in order to minimize the potential risk exposure and harm of the child, and the child is more likely to develop depressive emotions and manifestations.

The relationship between children's self-competence and depression is not significant, which is not consistent with previous research results (Huang, 2013). Previous studies have found that the self-competence level of middle school students is significantly negatively correlated with depression, and the level of self-esteem can better predict the occurrence and development of depression. This study did not find a significant relationship between self-competence and child depression, which may be because this effect only occurs in a specific group, and the subject of this study is elementary school

students, so there is no significant correlation. At the same time, self-competence is an individual's self-judgment on whether he or she is qualified for study and work, while depression is an emotional or mood state. The two are in different states and positions in the psychological process. Therefore, the relationship between the two may have other mediating variables or moderating variables. For example, the possible intermediary effects of social support networks and friendship quality.

It is generally believed that children's self-competence is a positive psychological quality, while parents' anxious parenting behaviors and children's depression are not conducive to children's mental health. However, some scholars have stated that if the child's social support network and psychological resilience are strong, the parent's anxious parenting behavior may also bring attention and reduce the child's level of depression. Therefore, although parents' anxious parenting behavior will have a negative impact on children in most families, it is after all a manifestation of intimacy and attachment. Although they are not sure of the degree, they can still affect those societies children who lack structure or other support play a role. This conclusion actually reflects a fact worth paying attention to from the side: children's dependence on their parents is indeed a one-way and unavoidable attachment. No matter how parents behave, children are likely to regard their parents' company as their safest harbor.

In addition, this study also found that self-competence has a moderating effect between anxious rearing and children's depression. Specifically, for children with relatively high self-competence, anxious rearing does not significantly predict children's depression. For children with relatively low levels of self-competence, anxious rearing positively predicts the child's depression level. This study proves that self-competence can regulate the relationship between anxious rearing and children's depression. This conclusion is conducive to screening children who are susceptible to depression, so as to carry out early intervention. By screening out people who have experienced parental anxiety education, when they show low self-competence, they should pay necessary attention, and implement psychological support and psychological intervention for them as soon as possible, which will help prevent the appearance and deterioration of their depressive symptoms. At the same time, it also provides corresponding educational inspiration for school education. When the child is in an anxious upbringing environment, the school can reduce the child's possible depression by improving the child's self-competence or self-esteem.

5. Conclusion

Anxious rearing is positively correlated with children's depression, and self-competence is negatively correlated with children's depression. Anxious rearing may cause depression in children, but the self-competence of children can alleviate this effect.

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Note(s)

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