



# Patterns of Specificity in Parenting Behaviors, Child Affectivity, and Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms



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## Introduction

- Maladaptive parenting behaviors are thought to influence the development and maintenance of internalizing symptoms.
- For example, high levels of parental control are associated with child anxiety (Eley et al., 2010). In contrast, studies of child depressive symptoms have focused more on the role of low parental warmth (Patton et al., 2001).
- Parents who are overly controlling may limit their child's autonomy and hold more overprotective attitudes. Low parental warmth may lead children to feel rejected and less close with their parents.
- To date, however, few studies have examined whether these parenting variables are specifically linked to anxiety versus depression, and vice versa.
- Furthermore, while the relation between parenting and children's adjustment is considered highly dependent on children's temperament, few studies have examined the pattern of specificity of these relationships to anxiety and depression.

## Aims

- To examine correlations between parental overcontrol, parental warmth, child anxiety symptoms, and child depressive symptoms
- To determine whether these relationships are maintained after accounting for, or perhaps dependent on, children's temperamental affectivity

## Methods

**Participants:** 189 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders (ages 8-11, 53% males; 77% European American) recruited from five suburban schools in NY

**Measures** (all self-report questionnaires completed at school):

**Positive and Negative Affect Schedule for Children (PANAS-C):**

- Includes NA scale, with 15 one-word feeling items (e.g., scared)
- Children rated extent (very slightly/not at all to extremely) to which they usually feel each way "on the average"

**EMBU Parenting Survey**

- 40-item scale, including maternal warmth (e.g., "does your mother like you just the way you are?") and overcontrol (e.g., "does your mother want you to reveal your secrets to her?")
- Children rated frequency of each parenting behavior from No, never (1) to Yes, most of the time (4)

**Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS)**

- 47-item survey, including anxiety (e.g., "I worry about things") and depressive symptom (e.g., "I have no energy for things") subscales
- Children rated frequency over past week (never to always)
- Completed at baseline (T1) and one-year follow-up (T2)

## Results

- As indicated in Table 1A, maternal overcontrol was correlated with anxiety symptoms but not depressive symptoms. Maternal warmth was associated with depressive symptoms but not anxiety symptoms.
- Partial correlations were performed to evaluate associations between parenting and symptom scores after accounting for NA. As indicated in Table 1B, significant partial correlations were observed between overcontrol and anxiety symptoms, as well as between warmth and depressive symptoms.
- Regression analyses examined interactive relations among NA and significant EMBU variables in predicting anxiety and depression scores. NA ( $B = .476, p < .001$ ) and overcontrol ( $B = .231, p < .001$ ) were significant in predicting anxiety scores. NA ( $B = .549, p < .001$ ) and warmth ( $B = -.225, p < .001$ ) were significant in predicting depression scores. Relevant interactions were not significant in predicting anxiety (NA x control) or depression scores (NA x warmth).
- Correlations between parenting variables and anxiety/depressive symptoms were not significant at T2.

Table 1. Correlations Between Parenting Variables & Anxiety/Depressive Symptoms (Sx)

	A. Bivariate Correlations		B. Partial Correlations <sup>+</sup>	
	Anxiety Sx	Depressive Sx	Anxiety Sx	Depressive Sx
Maternal Overcontrol	.256***	.149*	.280**	.166
Maternal Warmth	-.067	-.301***	.126	-.295**

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$  Note: All variables assessed at T1

<sup>+</sup>Partial correlations account for child Negative Affect (NA)

## Discussion

- Although anxiety and depression demonstrate high comorbidity and overlap in childhood, these findings suggest they may exhibit distinct relationships with parenting behaviors.
- These relations held after accounting for NA, an affectivity variable highly correlated with internalizing symptoms, suggesting parenting adds a unique contribution toward understanding anxiety/depression.
- While further research is needed, these results may also point toward distinct potential avenues for targeting parenting behaviors in treatment for anxiety and depression.
- Further study should incorporate parent-report measures of parenting behaviors and other variables.

## References

- Eley, T. C., & Stevenson, J. (2000). Specific life events and chronic experiences differentially associated with depression and anxiety in young twins. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 28, 383-394.
- Patton, G. C., Coffey, C., Posterino, M., Carlin, J. B., & Wolfe, R. (2001). Parental 'affectionless control' in adolescent depressive disorder. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 36, 475-480.



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