

## **Maternal Over-Protection and Achievement Motivation among High School Students**

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**Abstract:** *The present study was undertaken to examine the achievement motivation of adolescent boys and girls as a function of perceived maternal protection. In a quasi-experimental study, twenty five adolescents who perceive themselves as highly protected by their mothers were compared with another group of 25 adolescents who do not perceive themselves as highly protected, in terms of their achievement motivation. A sample of 100 students (N=100) studying in grades VIII, IX, and X were administered the Parent-Child Relationship Scale (Rao, 1989). On the basis of their scores on this scale, the top 25 and bottom 25 students comprised the high and low maternal protection groups respectively. Both the groups were administered the Rao's Achievement Motivation Test (D. Gopal Rao). In order to compare the two groups in terms of their achievement motivation scores an independent samples t-test was conducted. Results revealed a significant difference between the high and low maternal protection groups favouring the former with regard to achievement motivation. Results are discussed within the context of the present Indian Society.*

**Keywords:** *Achievement motivation, Care, Parental overprotection, Parent-child relation, Warmth*

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### **I. Introduction**

Since long, psychologists have been considering the quality of parent-child interaction as having a crucial influence on a child's academic performance and development (Bailey, Montrose & Phillip 1970; Barnard & Kelly, 1990; DeBaryshe, Patterson & Capaldi, 1993; Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988; Russo & Owens, 1982; Taylor, Clayton & Rowley, 2004). A relationship between parenting style and the child's behaviour is present across culture and social strata, though there are sometimes differences in the degree and nature of this relationship among the cultures (Chao, 1994, 2001; Jackson-Newsom, Buchanan, & McDonald, 2008; Lim & Lim, 2003; Rudy and Grusec, 2001).

Traditionally, psychologists like Baumrind (1971, 1991) and Maccoby and Martin (1983) used a set of dimensions like "permissive versus restrictiveness" and "control versus support" to conceptualize four different parenting styles, such as authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved. More recently, Barber and his colleagues have suggested dimensions like behavioral and psychological control (Barber 1996; Barber, Maughan, & Olsen, 2005). Behavioral control refers to parents' attempts to control and regulate their children's behavior by rules setting and monitoring. But psychological control refers to intrusions into the psychological development of the child, through love withdrawal, making the child dependent and the use of guilt. Thus, authoritative style is characterized by warm parent-child relationships accompanied by high behavioural control, low psychological control, a reasoned, gentle, emotionally neutral approach to discipline. This enables parents to retain authority and simultaneously to listen to input from the child. Permissive style associated with parental warmth, low behavioural control, low psychological control, a reasoned approach to discipline, and thereby deemphasizing parental authority. In contrast, low warmth, high behavioural control, high psychological control, use of harsh discipline, little input for adolescents in decision making, and heavy emphasis on parental authority are the defining characteristics of authoritarian parenting style. Lastly, uninvolved or indulgent parenting is defined by a lack of warmth, low behavioural as well as psychological control. Uninvolved parents tend to lack involvement in the child's day to day life and overall development.

Behavioral control is more strongly linked to externalizing problems in adolescents, while psychological control is more strongly associated with internalizing problems (Barber, Olsen, Shagle, 1994, 2005).

There is abundance of literature (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Millstein, Holmbeck, Fischer, & Shapera, 2001; Steinberg 1989) showing associations between authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, or uninvolved parenting on one hand and adolescent behavior such as intellectual development, academic achievement, personality characteristics like deviance, anxiety, or depression etc. on the other. Each style has its own pattern of influence. While children of authoritative parents may show healthy signs of social development and higher degree of emotional self-control, authoritarian parents, through their high expectations for obedience, may promote skills such as self-regulation but typically do not give their

children the opportunity to develop self-expression. Children of permissive parents may have extensive chances for self-expression, but lack the rule-focused framework to build emotional regulation and control. The worse affected are the rejected children who are likely to suffer developmentally from a lack of parental warmth, interest or attention.

Parental warmth is reflected through concern for the child and parent-child harmony. It is a predominant factor in the development of the child. It has to do with the quality of the affectional bond between parents and their children. Parental warmth is rooted in the need gratification, both physical and psychological, early in the child's development. It results in the development of a sense of safety in responding to her environment. Lack of warmth has been found to be increasing children's risk of developing behavioural and emotional problems (Shaw, Owens, Vondra, & Winslow, 1996).

Though parental warmth and nurturance have been associated with high self-esteem, independence and optimal intellectual development in the children (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 1987; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Rohner, 1986), it is also true that too much of a good thing becomes harmful, in that over-protective and too-strict parenting styles have also been found to have detrimental effects on children. While parental uninvolvedness may have negative impact on cognitive and personality development of the child, over-involvement on the part of the parent can also lead to negative outcomes for young people disallowing child's personal growth, development, autonomy, and independence (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979).

Parental overprotection can be understood as an excessive level of maternal or paternal involvement or protection in proportion to the developmental level and abilities of the child (Thomasgard, Metz, Edelbrock, & Shonkoff, 1995). An overprotective parent is one who is (i) is highly supervising and vigilant, (ii) has difficulties with separation from the child, (iii) discourages independent behaviour, and (iv) is highly controlling. Studies have associated parental overprotection with depression and anxiety, lower self esteem, lower self-confidence and a dysfunctional attitude about achievement (Edwards & Rapee, 2007; Mofrad, Abdullah, & Samah, 2009; Otani, Suzuki, Matsumoto, Shibuya, Sadahiro, & Enokido, 2013). Wood and his colleagues (Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Hwang, & Chu, 2003) opined that parental overprotection contributes to children's anxiety, dependence, and social withdrawal. In a study by Holmbeck, Johnson, Wills, McKernon, Rose, Erkin, and Kemper (2002) less behavioural autonomy and more adjustment problems were reported in the children of overprotective parents. Restricted autonomy on the part of the children fosters their dependency on parents, and lead children to internalizing problems (Hudson & Rapee, 2001).

So far as the effects of parental overprotection are concerned, two explanations have been advanced. According to the one advocated by Chorpita, Brown, & Barlow (1998), over-controlling parenting provides excessive protection from negative consequences of life events and encourage dependency on parents. When mothers provide their children with high level of protection during developmental periods, children's perception of their own abilities or their control over their environment may be affected, thus lowering their self-efficacy. In this case, children may develop external locus of control and feeling of helplessness. On the other hand, Parker and his colleagues (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979; Parker, 1983) in their model included a second variable, care. Care is defined by the parent's ability to communicate, express affection, and promote closeness with the child. According to the latter model, overprotection and care interact with each other. Moderate to high levels of parental overprotection and care can have positive effects on the parent-child relationship and the child's health.

A study by Bean, Bush, Mckenry, and Wilson (2003) comparing the impact of parental support, behavioural control and psychological control on the academic achievement of European American and African American adolescents revealed that maternal support was significantly related to academic achievement in African American group. But maternal behavioural control and psychological control were significantly related to academic achievement in the European American youths.

While a positive parent child relation can facilitate the child's development and raise his levels of achievement (Heaven and Ciarrochi, 2008, Jeynes, 2007), an unsupportive type of parent-child relationship can result in low academic performance. Academic success depends on the cognitive abilities, motivation, and beliefs of the child. There is no controversy regarding the role of IQ in academic success. But academic competence is also influenced by beliefs and attitudes about school, self-perceptions about one's academic abilities and motivations to succeed. All these variables are influenced by the nature of parenting style. Parental expectations are directly related to the level of achievement motivation in their sons and daughters (McClelland, 1961). McClelland suggested parents' ways like giving warmth and support, providing good environment, setting goal, giving reasons dealing with cultural value among many others for enhancing achievement motivation in the child. In a study by Suman and Umapathy (2003), achievement motivation was found to be highest among boys who perceived their parents as less rejecting, followed by those who perceived their parents as loving and demanding. Lowest achievement motivation was found among those who perceived their parents as neglecting and less loving.

As parental overprotection may communicate messages to the child that they cannot be trusted, will always make mistakes, there may then be no opportunity on the part of the parents to praise his effort and coping strategies. This may prevent any possible learning from experience to take place. The child, without any goal of his own, may therefore reduce his effort, even he may lose his desire to achieve. The present study is designed to examine whether perceived parental overprotection is related to achievement motivation.

In the mother- father-child triadic relationship, though both the mother and the father assume important roles, the child may show a preference for one parent to the other parent (Ban & Lewis, 1974) depending on the amount of time spent with and the quality of care. In the Indian context, children usually seem to be more close to their mothers than their fathers as the former spend more time with them and the latter are seen to be strict, rigid and angry or many a times negligent. Mothers become more involved with the education and achievement of the children as father more often take the role outside the family of the bread earner. The emotional needs are met more by the mothers due to their inborn nature. Therefore, the present study is designed to examine the effect of maternal overprotection on adolescents' achievement motivation in the high school students following a quasi-experimental design.

## II. Method

### 2.1 Sample

A sample of 100 students (N=100) studying in class VIII, IX, and X of Ravenshaw Collegiate School, Cuttack, Odisha, India, was administered the Protection subscale of the Parent Child Relationship Scale developed by Rao (1989). On the basis of their scores on this scale, the top 25 and the bottom 25 students were taken. The former students constituted the high maternal protection group while the latter group of students formed the low maternal protection group. Both boys and girls were selected as participants. All the students were coming from middle socioeconomic status with the monthly salaries of the parents ranging from 20,000 to 60,000 rupees. The description of the sample characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table1. Description of the Sample Characteristics

Group	N	Age group	Gender	Mean Years of Maternal education	Mean maternal protection score
Low maternal protection	25	14-16 years	Male=18 Female=7	13.56	30.88
High maternal protection	25	14-16 years	Male=7 Female=18	14.68	43.72

### 2.2 Instrument

**Parent Child Relationship Scale.** This scale has been developed by Dr. Nalini Rao (1989). The test contains 100 items categorised into ten dimensions such as, protection, symbolic punishment, object punishment, demanding, indifferent, symbolic reward, loving, object reward and neglect. Thus each dimension is measured by ten items. The respondents are asked to rate the statements as per their own perception of their relationship with their parents on a five point scale ranging from always to very rarely. Scores of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 are given to each of the response categories, namely always, many times, sometimes, and rarely and very rarely, respectively. Thus a maximum score of 50 and a minimum score of 10 could be obtained on each dimension. The items are to be scored for father and mother separately. Items are common for both the parents except for three items, due to the nature of the variation in paternal and maternal relationship with children. According to the purpose of the present study, only the protection scores for the mother were taken for analysis.

**Rao's Achievement Motivation Test.** This test has been constructed by Dr. D. Gopal Rao. This test provides a simple and objective measure of achievement motivation of secondary school pupils. There are 20 incomplete sentences. The respondent is required to complete each sentence from among two given alternatives with the one he generally prefers. Though both of the alternatives are achievement oriented and socially acceptable, one of them is high achievement related (HAR) and the other one is general achievement related (GAR). The GAR and HAR responses get scores of 1 and 3 respectively. Thus the minimum score on this test is 20 while the maximum score is 60.

### 2.3. Procedure

After taking permission from the principal of the school, the researcher tried to establish rapport with the students. A total of 100 students studying in class VIII, IX, and X were administered the Parent Child Relationship Scale (Nalini Rao, 1989). The perceived maternal protection scores of 100 students were calculated and ranked from highest to lowest. The top 25 and the bottom 25 scorers on this scale constituted the high and low maternal protection groups respectively.

Then, these two groups of students were administered the Rao's Achievement Motivation Test. The responses of the students were scored according to the manual. The data, thus collected were subjected to statistical analyses.

Both the tests were administered in group in a free period within the school hour.

### III. Results

Keeping the objective of the study in mind, the scores of both the high and low maternal protection groups on the Achievement Motivation Test were compared by means of independent sample t test. Table 2 presents the group wise means, Standard Deviations of the high and low maternal protection groups and t value.

**Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviations, and t Value of the Low and High Maternal Protection Groups (N=25 in Each Group) for Achievement Motivation**

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	Significance
Low maternal protection	25	47.64	3.86	2.247	.029
High maternal protection	25	49.92	3.29		

From Table 2, it can be noticed that the mean and Standard Deviation of the low maternal protection group was found to be 47.64 and 3.86 respectively and those for the high maternal protection group was 49.92 and 3.29 respectively. The t-value was found to be 2.25 having a significance value of 0.029. Thus, both the high and low maternal protection groups were significantly different from each other. Considering the mean values, it can be said that adolescents who perceive themselves to be comparatively more overprotected by their mothers were having higher achievement motivation in comparison to those who perceive less maternal protection.

### IV. Discussion and Conclusion

Research has associated parenting variables such as warmth, support, care, encouragement and involvement etc. with achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961; Suman and Umaphathy, 2003; Trusty, 1999). Suman and Umaphathy (2003) have shown high achievement motivation in boys who perceive their parents as loving and demanding; and less achievement motivation with neglecting and rejecting parents.

But parental overprotection has been found to result in lower self esteem, lower self-confidence, dependence and a dysfunctional attitude about achievement (Edwards & Rapee, 2007; Mofrad, Abdullah, & Samah, 2009; Otani, Suzuki, Matsumoto, Shibuya, Sadahiro, & Enokido, 2013, Wood et al, 2003). Holmbeck, Johnson, Wills, McKernon, Rose, Erklin, and Kemper (2002) reported decreased behavioural autonomy in the children of overprotective parents. Restricted autonomy may be contributing to unnecessary dependency on parents (Hudson & Rapee, 2001). According to Chorpita et al (1998), excessive parental protection may foster feelings of helplessness and an external locus of control in the child. Such qualities are not at all favourable to the development of achievement motivation.

But the present study documents higher achievement motivation in adolescents who perceive their mothers to be more protective. Adolescents with high achievement motivation try to get good grades, to outstand others in curricular and co- as well as extra-curricular activities, to work hard for a bright future, and to succeed in life. While parental protection, as per literature, fosters overdependence in children, achievement motivation is associated with self-reliance, self- confidence and hard work. So the results of the present study, at first glance, may appear surprising in that, higher achievement motivation was found in the high maternal protection group. In this context, views of Parker and his colleagues is worth mentioning. Parker et al (1979) theorized that so far as the effects of parental overprotection are concerned, it interacts with parental care. According to them, though overprotection disallows autonomy and independence, when combined with high degree of parental care may have positive results. Hence the results of the present study are in line with Parker's views. Parental care is reflected in parental expression of affection as well as closeness with the child.

Another important observation is that, as Table 1 reveals, girls significantly outnumbered boys in the high maternal protection group, while there were more boys than girls in the low maternal protection group ( $\chi^2 = 8.34, p < .05$ ). This implies that more girls perceive themselves to be highly over protected by their mothers than the boys. Ravi and Rayalu (2007) in their study also observed differences in the perceptions of adolescent boys and girls with regard to their mothers' behaviour. Probably due to increasing number of crimes against

women in the present society, parents are careful of protecting their adolescent girls from any mishap. And adolescent girls perceive this as the curtailing of their freedom and overprotection.

In the earlier days, it was generally seen that boys were more valued by their parents. They were expected to play a dominant role in the society. They were more encouraged to study so that they would contribute more to their family economically. Therefore, parents were overprotective of their male children. This condition still prevails in the rural areas and in some ways in the urban areas as well. But, due to urbanization and modernization such condition is seen to be the opposite. Attitude towards the girl child is gradually changing (Das, 2013), particularly in the urban areas. Women are now taking a front seat in every aspect of our modern society whether it is academics or any other aspects. Therefore, though parents are vigilant of and controlling their adolescent daughters' outdoor activities, they are providing equal care, affection and encouragement to their male and female children. Thus overprotection combined with care might have enhanced the achievement motivation in the adolescents.

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