The Relation between Parenting Styles and Attachment among Preschool Children in the Gaza strip

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to investigate the relationship between parenting styles and attachment among preschool children in the Gaza Strip.

Method: Participants were 392 parents (380 mothers and 12 fathers) of preschoolers. Parents’ were intervened with Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and Parent/Child Reunion Inventory (P/CRI).

Results: For parent’s styles, 64% of parents (mainly mothers) had controlling-oriented pattern of parenting (a combination of authoritative and authoritarian); 22.7% had the authoritative parenting style; and 11% had a flexible pattern of parenting (a combination of authoritative and flexible parenting styles). It was found that the authoritative parenting behaviors were common in in all participated parents either distinctively (within the authoritative parenting style) or combined with parenting behaviors of other styles (within the controlling-oriented and the flexible patterns). The authoritative parenting style was more in boys and in high monthly income families (more than $850). The flexible pattern was mostly in mothers whose husbands are conscientious with either high (more than $850) or low (lower than $400) monthly income. Results indicated that 86% of preschoolers were securely attached and 9.7% of them were insecurely attached to their mothers. Further, the insecure attachment to the mother was among children with low monthly income. No significant relation was found between parenting styles and secure attachment among preschool children, while a significant relation was found between parenting styles and insecure attachment.

Keywords: Attachment; Gaza strip; Parental styles; Preschool children

Clinical Implications

The results of such study highlight the need for parental training of better ways of rearing practice of their children and increase communication with their children in their early years of life. Courses for single couples before marriage to encourage them of using better parenting styles to overcome their children problems. Also, education courses for parents about types of attachment and better ways of using health attachments with their children must be conducted.

We recommended other researchers to focus on studying attachment of preschool children in the Gaza Strip and the parenting styles of both their fathers and mothers using different instruments and procedures in order to thoroughly explore the relation between parenting styles and attachment. To conduct research such as the relation between parenting styles and attachment of preschoolers using observations, the relation between mother’s adult attachment style and her child’s attachment, the impact of psychological control on child’s attachment.

Introduction

Being a parent and rearing children is an exciting and enjoyable experience in which both mother and father play an important role. However, for many overlapping reasons, parents’ ways of raising children may differ. The way in which a parent raises his child is considered a parenting style [1]. Indicated
that each family employs a particular parenting style affected by cultural, social, political, and economic factors, personality type, psychological state, a child’s behaviour, education, socioeconomic status and much more. During the early 1960s, psychologist Diana Baumrind conducted a study on Preschool-age children [2] and developed a theory of three distinct parenting styles: the authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting [3].

These three styles reflect the two dimensions of parenting which are responsiveness (the degree to which parents are supportive and sensitive to the child’s needs) and demandingness (the degree to which parents are demanding and control their children) [1]. Subsequent research has expanded on Baumrind’s three parenting styles by utilizing a fourfold classification: neglectful parenting style. Among all parenting styles, authoritative parenting is revealed to be the optimal one [4] (Parenting styles play an important role in the development of children, affecting a child’s behaviour, achievement, and intelligence).

They are considered an important determinant of several aspects of child’s optimism [5], externalizing problem behaviour and attention problems [6], and creativity [7,8] showed that protective parenting style is contribute to anticipate the children’s social adequacy, education progression and child mental health in future. A growing number of studies focused on the role of parent–child relations in children’s development of adverse psychological symptoms within the context of armed conflict [9]. Results emphasize the role of effective parenting in enhancing resilience and a sense of self-efficacy, and in attenuating psychological problems in children exposed to political violence.

Parental authority is said to be dependent on various factors which include social context, social classes and cultures. The culture may affect the maternal and paternal roles and control [10]. They found that maternal control gives the feeling of security and acceptance to Indian adolescents but not to German adolescents. The reason was cultural variations. A number of studies have demonstrated the influence of culture on parenting practices [11] and on parental authority and family relationship in accordance with cultural or gender difference has been investigated in a number of studies, [12]. Some research suggests that the influence of parenting styles may differ across ethnic groups [13,14].

It is well established in the research that authoritative parenting style is positively correlated with individualism, and many researchers have found strong correlations between authoritarian parenting style and collectivism [15]. For example, [16] argue that the parenting style practiced is very much dependent on the cultural context of the society and claim that Asian societies are more collectivist as compared to western societies, therefore, the outcome valued in collectivist groups may form the basis for authoritarian parenting, and is reflected as more appropriate as compared with other parenting styles.

These results are consistent with former results reported among the Palestinians in Israel [13,14], but seem to contradict other findings and reports concerning more strictness and oppression toward females, as compared to males, in Arab societies (The Arab Woman Developmental Report, 2003). In the study of [17], found that the parenting styles among Arabs are not as distinct as in the West, and that the three original parenting styles are not spread on a linear continuum where authoritarian and permissive styles are its two poles, rather, they constitute a closed triangular continuum in which authoritarianism and permissiveness together constitute one style.

Instead, they identified three mixed-parenting clusters, and labeled them as parenting patterns, which are: controlling-oriented parenting pattern that is a combination of authoritarian and authoritative styles, flexible parenting pattern that combines authoritative and permissive parenting, and inconsistent parenting pattern which combines authoritarian and permissive parenting. Caregivers’ responses to their children lead to the development of patterns of attachment [18]. Described attachment as a special emotional relationship that involves an exchange of comfort, care and pleasure, while [19] defined attachment as a strong emotional bond that develops between children and their parents [20]. Defines attachment styles as the typical ways of interacting in close relationships.

[21,22] found that parenting styles were associated with parenting in ways that may foster secure versus insecure attachment orientations [23] supported that the authoritative parenting style is the most positive determinant of intimate relationships. They found that maternal authoritative parenting style was associated with favorable or healthy same-sex friendships in girls. The characteristics of favorable and healthy friendships would be classified as secure attachment. While [19] defined attachment as a strong emotional bond that develops between children and their parents.

Attachment theory developed by Bowlby is one of the most accepted theories used in explaining the relationship between parental rearing and child attachment type. Expanding Bowlby’s work, after observing interactions of infants with their mothers, the developmental psychologist Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues (1978) identified three patterns of attachment: the secure, anxious/resistant, and anxious/avoidant attachment style. Further research by Mary Main and colleagues identified a fourth pattern, called disorganized/disoriented attachment [24]. It was noted by Ainsworth that the type of attachment depends on the quality of care, however, the quality of attachment and parenting change for some subjects. [10] determine the style developed at infancy stage continues to adolescence.

The study aims were:

i. To identify the parenting styles which are mostly utilized by parents –mainly mothers- of pre-school children of the Gaza Strip.
ii. To identify what styles of attachment (secure, insecure) are developed by the preschool children.

iii. To determine the relationships between the utilized parenting styles and the developed attachment styles.

iv. To show the influence of some variables (child’s gender and monthly income) on parenting styles and attachment.

**Method**

**Participants**

The study sample consisted of 400 mothers of preschool children. From this sample only 392 mothers were reached. The age of preschool children ranged from 3-6 years. Mean age was 4.48. The sample consisted of 195 boys (49.7%); and 197 girls (50.3%).

**Measures**

**Socio-demographic scale**

Demographic information about the participants includes sex, age, number of brothers and sisters, area of residence, and monthly family income.

**Parental authority questionnaire (PAQ)** [25]: Parental Authority Questionnaire PAQ [26] is a list of 30 statements concerning parent and instructs the respondent to rate the extent to which each statement applies to them of father. The statements are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = “strongly agree” to 5 = “strongly disagree”), and the measure yields scores on three subscales. The PAQ is designed to measure parental authority, or disciplinary practices, from the point of view of the child (of any age). The PAQ has three subscales: Permissive (P: items 1, 6, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24 and 28), Authoritarian (A: items 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 16, 18, 25, 26 and 29), and Authoritative/flexible (F: items 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 20, 22, 23, 27, and 30).

Mother and father forms of the assessment are identical except for references to gender. Scoring: The PAQ is scored easily by summing the individual items to comprise the subscale scores. Scores on each subscale range from 10 to 50 [26] reported Cronbach’s alpha values in the acceptable range across all subscales (mother authoritarian.85, mother permissive .75, mother authoritative .82, father authoritarian .87, father permissive .74, and father authoritative .85). Two-week test–retest reliability estimates for mothers’ and fathers’ parenting styles ranged from 0.77 to 0.92. In this study, internal consistency for permissive style using Cronbach’s Alpha was (α= 0.72), authoritarian style Cronbach’s Alpha was (α= 0.87), permissive style Cronbach’s Alpha was (α= 0.75).

**Parent/Child Reunion Inventory Marcus [26] Arabic Version:** The Parent/Child Reunion Inventory (P/CFI), developed by Marcus [26] which relies on the child’s internal working model of their attachment relationship. It is based on direct observations of childhood reunions and it provides parents with hypothetical everyday separation situations. Parents are asked to select behaviors that are shown by their child at reunion times. To assist with this, parents are asked to remember the last separation they had from their child lasting one hour or more. Parents rate each of the behaviors as ‘usually’ (2), ‘occasionally’ (1) or ‘never’ (0).

The P/CFI allows for the calculation of total secure and insecure scores. Six items measure secure attachment (range 0-12), and 14 items measure insecure attachment (range 0-28). The P/CFI is tentatively split into five insecure factors: insecure-avoidant-distancing (items 7, 8), insecure-avoidant (items 9, 10, 11, 12), insecure-anxious (items 13, 16), insecure-controlling (items 14, 15), and insecure-unspecified (items 17, 18, 19, 20). In this study the list was translated into Arabic by first and second authors and Thabet back translated to English with no major differences between the items. In this study the internal consistency of the subscales using Cronbach’s alpha, showed that secure subscale was (α= 0.64) and insecure subscale was (α=0.70).

**Study Procedure**

According to Ministry of Education (2012), the number of children registered at Kindergartens was 44,369 child and there are 392 Kindergartens distributed on the five areas. We used Epi-info sample size calculator and had a sample size of 374 at 95% confidence level. We extended the sample to 400 to cover for possible non respondents. A multistage sampling technique was used to select 400 children from 20 Kindergartens. The number of selected Kindergartens in each area was determined according to its representation from the total number of Kindergartens, then these Kindergartens were randomly selected. In addition, the number of children in each area was determined according to its representation from the total number of children, then this number was distributed on the selected Kindergartens in each area.

In each selected Kindergartens, a systematic sampling was done to choose the each child from the students’ record. Ethical letter was sent to the general director of Ministry Of Education in November 2013. Data were collected from 17th of November 2013 to 20th of January 2014, followed by coding and entering data onto the computer and data analysis during the last week of January. For the parents who were selected, they were told about the study and were asked for their agreement to participate in it. The questionnaires were completed initially with the mother, and –in case of inability to reach the mother- the father substituted her.

Given that most of preschool children of the Gaza Strip are registered at Kindergartens, the mothers (the study population) were reached through randomly-selected preschool children who are registered at approved Kindergartens of the Gaza. We herself collected the data through structured interviews with parents. It was initially intended to invite the selected mothers to complete the questionnaires at the Kindergartens for the sake
of neutrality, but unfortunately, mothers were uncooperative as the number of mothers who responded to this attempt was very small each time.

Thus, for time considerations, We took their addresses and went to their homes to fill the questionnaires. Each item was asked by We in the same way each time. Data collection took place through two months. Respondents number was 392 parent (380 mothers and 12 fathers). An ethical approval was taken from Helsinki Committee, in addition to the Ministry of Education.

Statistical Analysis

We used Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) version 20 for data entry and analysis. Frequency tables that show sample characteristics and plot differences between characteristics variables were done. Moreover, cross tabulation for main findings and advanced statistical tests such as Chi square test to compare categorical variables, and T test or One way ANOVA test to compare means of numeric variables were done when required to analyze questionnaire data. Data entry took place through eight days, and data was revised twice, while data analysis took ten days.

Results

Socio demographic

As shown in Table 1, the total number of questionnaires returned were 392. The age of preschool children ranged from 3-6 years. Mean age was 4.48. The sample consisted of 195 boys (49.7%); and 197 girls (50.3%). Regarding place of residence, 22.2% of children were from North Gaza, 24.7% were from Gaza, 14.3% from Middle zone, 21.4% from Khan Younis, and 16.8% from Rafah.

Table 1: Distribution of the sample related to socio-demographic variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Gaza</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlezone</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan Younis</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafah</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parenting styles by parents of preschool children

The results indicated that 22.7% of the total sample had authoritative parenting style, 64% had controlling-oriented pattern (a combination of authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles), 11% had flexible pattern (a combination of authoritative and permissive parenting styles), and 2.3% had combination of the three parenting styles together (Table 2).

Table 2: Parenting styles of parents of preschoolers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parenting Style</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling-oriented</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of Three PS</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences in authoritative parenting style related to socio demographic variables

T-test was used to test for differences related to child’s gender. The mean for males was (2.87) and the S.D. was (0.15); while for females, the mean was (2.79) and the S.D was (0.14). Results indicated a significant difference with male children where P value =0.027 (<.05), as shown in Table (4.3). This means that there’s a significant difference related to child’s gender. One-way ANOVA test was used to test for differences related to monthly income. Results indicated a significant difference as (P value=0.006 which is <0.05). LSD test indicated the direction of this difference. Results indicated that families with high income (more $850) are more authoritative than families with moderate ($400-$850) and low income (less than $400).

Differences in controlling-oriented pattern related to socio demographic variables

Independent t test was conducted to test significant differences in parenting styles related to child’s gender. Results showed that there were significant differences toward males in Authoritative parent style (t = 2.4, p < 0.03) and flexible parent style was significantly more in girls (t = 2.78, p < 0.01) (Table 3).
Differences in parental styles according to family monthly income

One-way ANOVA test was used to test for differences in parental styles and family monthly income. Post Hoc test using Tukey showed that there were significant differences in authoritative parenting style in which families with high income (More $851) were more authoritative than families with moderate (From $401-$850) and low income (Less than $400) (F=5.51, p<.006). There were significant differences in flexible style in which families with moderate income ($401-$850) were less flexible than those with high (More $851) or low income (Less than $400) (F=5.32, p<.009). There were no significant differences in controlling-oriented pattern style according to family monthly income (F=.33, p<.71). There were no significant differences in combining authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles and monthly income (F=.08, p<.77).

Attachment of preschoolers

The results showed that 86% of children were classified as having secure attachment, 9.7% was classified as having insecure attachment, and 4.3% had equal scores in both subscales (Table 4).

Table 4: Attachment styles of preschoolers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of insecurely attached children on insecurity factors

Thirty eight insecure children were distributed on insecurity factors as follows: 25 child (65.7% of insecure children) had the highest percentage in the insecure-anxious factor, 4 children (10.5% of insecure children) had the highest percentage in the insecure-controlling factor, 3 children (7.9% of insecure children) had the highest percentage in insecure-avoidant-distancing factor, 3 children (7.9% of insecurely attached children) scored the highest percentage in both insecure-anxious and insecure-unspecific factors, and one child (2.6% of insecurely attached children) scored the highest percentage in three factors: insecure-avoidant, anxious, and controlling (Table 5).

Table 5: Distribution of insecurely attached children on insecurity factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant-distancing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious and controlling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious and unspecified</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant, anxious, and controlling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences in secure attachment related to socio demographic variables

Regarding differences in secure attachment related to socio demographic variables, Independent t-test was used with child’s gender, while ANOVA test was used with sex of children and monthly income. In case of presence of a significant difference, LSD test was used to find the direction of the difference. No significant differences in secure children according to sex of children (t = 1.46, p = 0.14). LSD test showed no significant differences according to family monthly income.

Differences in insecure attachment and socio demographic variables

No significant differences in insecure attachment according to children sex. LSD test showed that there were a significant differences in insecure children in moderate income families than low income (F=, p<0.)

Differences in flexible pattern related to socio demographic variables

The total number of responders in this group = 43. T-test was used to test for differences related to child’s gender; while one-way ANOVA test was used to test for differences related to mother’s educational level, child’s birth order; and monthly income. In case of presence of significant differences within them, LSD test was used to find the direction of difference. Results indicated the presence of significant difference related to child’s gender and monthly income, while no significant difference was found related to mother’s education and child’s birth order.

The relationship between parenting styles and attachment

To explore the relation between parenting styles and attachment, a Pearson’s correlation test was done. Results indicated no significant relation between any of the four parenting patterns utilized and secure attachment where Pearson’s correlation coefficient between the authoritative parenting style and secure attachment r=0.03, between controlling-oriented...
pattern and secure attachment $r=0.074$, between flexible pattern and secure attachment $r=0.052$, and between secure attachment and the pattern combined of authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles $r=0.052$. This means that parenting styles are not effective variables in developing secure attachment among preschoolers. On the other hand, a significant relation was found between parenting styles and insecure attachment. The authoritative parenting style had a significant relation with insecure attachment in general ($r=0.175$), with insecure-anxious attachment ($r=0.15$, $p=0.01$), and with insecure-unspecified attachment ($r=0.18$, $p=0.02$). Controlling-oriented pattern had a significant relation with insecure attachment in general ($r=0.15$, $p=0.01$), with insecure-avoidant attachment ($r=0.10$, $p=0.01$), and with insecure-unspecified attachment ($r=0.21$, $p=0.01$). Flexible pattern had a significant relation with insecure-anxious attachment ($r=0.23$, $p=0.01$); and the pattern combining authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles had a significant relation with insecure attachment in general ($r=0.12$, $p=0.01$) and with insecure-anxious attachment ($r=0.12$, $p=0.01$) (Table 6).

### Table 6: Pearson's correlation between parenting styles and attachment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Authoritative</th>
<th>Controlling-Oriented</th>
<th>Flexible</th>
<th>Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure avoidant-distrusting</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure avoidant</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure anxious</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure controlling</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure unspecified</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, ***p<.01, **p<.001

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relation between parenting styles and attachment among preschool children of the Gaza Strip. Our study showed that parenting styles were distributed as follows: the authoritative parenting style (22.2%) which is consistent with [2] parenting styles, the controlling-oriented pattern (64%) which is a combination of authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles, the flexible pattern (11.5%) which is a combination of authoritative and permissive parenting styles, and a combination of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting style (2.3%).

The finding of controlling-oriented and flexible patterns is consistent with the findings of [17]. Even though the number of parents utilizing the latter pattern (a combination of the three parenting styles together) is very small compared to the total sample (n=9), ethics forces we to consider it and respect results as they are. Anyway, this finding is consistent with criticism of Baumrind’s typology. He supported the theory that parental control and warmth may be compatible in some collective societies. In addition, many studies using Baumrind’s parenting prototypes have found that the majority of their samples do not fit into any of the four styles [27,28].

Inconsistent parenting pattern proposed by Dwairy [17] was not found to be utilized by the sample of this study. [17] said that inconsistent pattern which was high in Yemen and Palestinians in Israel is attributed to mixed and contradicting social-political systems in these areas and that this mixed pattern among the Palestinians in Israel may indicate the dual culture in which they live. On one hand, as Palestinians they share the Arabic authoritarian and collective culture, and on the other hand, as Israeli citizens they are exposed to Israeli-Western cultural influences and they tend to absorb some liberal values. This dual culture may be expressed in this mixed and contradicting parenting style. We can explain why it is not utilized here.

In the Gaza Strip, even before the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in September 2005, Israeli citizens were living in isolated settlements apart from Palestinians, leading to very little or even no direct contact between both of them. Besides, Palestinians were fighting against the Israeli occupation and attempting to protect their identity by many means, one of which was rejecting the Western life style. This greatly lowers the effect of Western culture on Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. This was consistent with was found that the Palestinian Israeli citizens respond to exposure to the Israeli culture differently than the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation do, where they resist the Western influences [17]. Parenting styles differ across Arab countries and the effect of parenting styles depends on cultural context and parent-gender [13], so we can rely on the native culture to explain the results indicating utilization of combinations of parenting mixed patterns-rather than distinct ones- in a number of points explaining why it may be difficult for parents to follow through certain and strict parenting practices all the time.

First: In the Gaza Strip, compared with other Arab countries and Muslim families, the father is the head of the household to which the wife acquiesces, and she is the disciplinarian of the children when the father is not present. Given that, and also for the sake of avoiding conflicts, a mother in the presence of the father-may utilize the parenting practices which he sees as suitable and important, and when he is absent, she may use different practices...
which she sees as more suitable and important. An example is the mother’s use of physical punishment of the child in response to an undesired behavior in the presence of his father to avoid being blamed or accused of spoiling the child, while using neglect in response to the same behavior in the absence of the father. This may lead to a mixture of different parenting practices and styles.

Second: The role of the extended family. In the Gaza Strip, the extended family is expected to play a large role in rearing a child. Mostly, the father in law and the mother in law have full authority over the child when the husband is not present, and this authority extends to involve the children either directly or indirectly. The authority over children is also practiced by uncles and aunts, usually unmarried ones. The mother is expected to accept these members’ orders and to adapt many of the grandparents’ parenting practices either because of respect or to avoid being labelled as a bad mother, or to avoid conflicts with them which will affect her family’s security, or simply she may get convinced of some of their practices and learn them then combine them with her ones.

A report published in the National Center for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy points out that parenting is a learned skill which can be improved through education and experience (NCIECHP, 2003). It’s worthy to note that the role of extended family is doubled when they are financially responsible of the smaller family. This is the case in general in the Gaza Strip. The bad socio-economic status in the Gaza Strip had led many of nuclear families and nuclear-in-extended families to depend financially on the extended family. Logically, the one who is financially responsible and independent (here: the extended family) is stronger and has the right to determine what is accepted and what is not, what is right and what is wrong regarding many aspects of life including child parenting.

This probably led to multiple authorities in the same family (the parents, the grandparents, uncles, and aunts), which in turn led to multiple parenting practices and therefore, mixed parenting styles. Third, parents are just people, no more, no less. This makes them confronted to bad mood at any time during the day due to life’s daily stressors. The stresses in one’s daily life can affect the way he had parenting behaviours. In the Gaza Strip, one of the major stressors is poverty caused by unemployment or low income. Poverty is blocking the ways of parents to perform the role of good parenting [29]. Money problems, unemployment, and health issues can interfere with parents developing bonds with their children, setting boundaries and have expectations for their children, all of which affect their parental style.

The experience of long-term poverty or having inadequate income imposes difficulties in meeting basic costs (including struggling to pay for food, accommodation, clothing, education, health care, utilities, transport) and thus causes a family stress process leading to family dysfunction, stress among caregivers and inadequate or less effective parenting (lack of control over the child’s behavior, lack of warmth and support, and inconsistency). This leads one to expect that parents may swing in their parenting practices from time to time.

For example, at some days when the mother experiences many stressors, she may be greatly distant from her child and gets unable to show warm feelings and support to him due to being preoccupied with other important matters; in this case she may displace her frustration on her child and may use harsh disciplines. At other days she may blame herself for her cruelty especially when she can’t satisfy his needs due to the lack of money; in this case she may try to compensate him by showing high warmth or remove any restrictions and may avoid discipline totally. In that way, mother is combining two or more parenting styles.

Forth: The child’s own personality and behaviours can set the tone for a parent’s child rearing philosophy. Both a parent’s temperament and that of a child can affect how they react to one another. Temperament is defined by Thomas and Chess’s as constitutionally based individual differences in emotion, motor, reactivity and self-regulation that demonstrate consistency across situations and over time. They noted that there are three types of temperaments: easy child, difficult child, and slow-to-warm-up child. Giving that, one can relate results to mothers’ attempts to find out the parenting style which best fits her child’s temperament through combining multiple parenting styles until she finds the ultimate one.

Fifth: The combination of multiple parenting styles resulted from this study might be due to methodological issues. It’s important to note that We collected the data by herself, asking the same question in the same way each time, thus, it’s not data collection procedure per se which affected the results. Rather, it might be the way of data collection as we asks the question and waits for the responder to answer-which affected results by the parents’ willingness to provide accurate information. They might have responded in a way that reflects what they perceived as accepted or good in their own culture, rather than what they actually used when interacting with their children, leading to limited accuracy of information.

In addition, discussing issues like parenting and child rearing might constitute a fertile soil for the appearance of two well-known defense mechanisms: denial and exaggeration, both of which might affect the results. Some might found the items of the questionnaire as violating their privacy and thus responded in an inaccurate way. Another probable cause of having inaccurate results might be the influence of other people who were present with the parent during data collection. In our culture, people are curious in general and inject themselves in almost everything to know what’s going on or to get benefit of any type. During data collection from some mothers, their mothers-in-law joined us. The presence of mothers-in-law might have influenced mothers’
styles of parenting, affecting the possibility of finding significant results.

As noted, results indicated the utilization of the authoritative parenting style. This finding is consistent with the study conducted in Jordan by Al Amir (2004) who found that Jordanian parents are more authoritative than authoritarian. However, it isn’t consistent with the study of [17] which indicated that Arab parents tend to be authoritarian. This inconsistency can be attributed to the small number of studies on parenting styles in Arab societies and to the absence of systematic examination of parenting patterns in Arab countries [30].

However, we attempted to explain the utilization of authoritative parenting style in this study by notifying that Arab countries have been experiencing a rapid and varying process of modernization and urbanization during the past few decades. Their populations are exposed to Western individualistic-liberal culture through TV and modern technologies mainly the internet and social networks. It could be that they adapted some of their life styles and parenting practices, focusing on authoritative parenting style as it is linked to positive outcomes in children.

In this study, the authoritative parenting style was found to be utilized by all parents in the sample (N=392) either distinctively or combined with other style/s. This result may lead one to question about it. We propose that it could be related to the culture of moderation, which characterizes people who live in the Gaza Strip. They live in an Islamic culture which encourages them through Hadith (prophetic tradition) to be moderate in almost all aspects of their lives. At the same time Islam encourages Muslims to be warm and kind with kids and to give them a lot of love and care.

Regarding control over the child’s behaviours, the authoritative parenting style lies in the middle between the permissive parenting style (very low or no control) and the authoritarian parenting style (high and usually harsh control) and regarding warmth and responsiveness, it’s the highest among the three parenting styles. Giving that, it becomes not surprising to find it as the favorite choice of all the responders in this study. Either it is utilized distinctly or in combination with other parenting styles is a matter of many other factors, as discussed earlier.

Regarding child’s gender, we found no difference in parenting styles related to child’s gender. Results indicated that parents “mainly mothers” utilize the flexible parenting pattern with girls, while they utilize the authoritative parenting style with boys. In other words, mothers tend to be more permissive with girls rather than boys. This could be thought of as a compensatory action of mothers towards their daughters who are renounced and uncelebrated in their culture compared to male children and have limited choices. These results are consistent with the results of many studies indicating that parents utilize more positive parenting on female than male child, [13,14,17,31-34].

For example, [33] indicated that females perceive a more positive quality relationship with their parents as compared to males; and [32] found that females are being praised and cuddled more than males; females are also being hit and shouted at less. However, these results are inconsistent with that of [17] who examined parenting style, adolescent-family connectedness, and mental health among 351 Egyptian adolescents, and found that male adolescents experienced a high level of the authoritarian style from their parents, whereas female adolescents reported a high level of the authoritative style from their parents. This inconsistency can be attributed to differences in the age of the sample. This study focuses on preschoolers while Dwairy’s focused on adolescents. Another cause could be the data collection procedure: parenting styles in this study are measured by structured interviews with parents, while Dwairy’s study measured parenting styles as perceived by adolescents.

Regarding monthly income, no significant relation was found between monthly income and both of controlling-oriented and the pattern combining the authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, while results indicated that families which earn a monthly income of lower than $400, and those which earn higher than $750, are more flexible than those families who earn a moderate monthly income. Those with low income could be more permissive with their child in order to compensate him for being unable to satisfy his needs continuously, thus they offer him a lot of warmth and lessens their demands and control.

This is consistent with the study of [35] who indicated that parents with low socio economic status tend toward more permissive parenting style. For those with high income, in these families it’s expected that both parents are working, leaving their child either in the Kindergartens or with another adult, thus, they offer him a lot of warmth and nurturance in order to compensate him for their absence. However, results also indicated that families with high income are more authoritative than families with moderate and low income. It could be that parents who earn higher income are expected to be less distressed, more able to respond to the child’s needs, and more able to utilize control other than punishment or neglect for their children (for example praising the child’s good behavior).

This finding is consistent with what [36] stated that higher socioeconomic status mothers tend to be more verbal when interacting with their children. However, these findings are inconsistent with [37] who found no significant relation between parenting styles and monthly income. He related his finding to parent’s answers, as people in general don’t favor this type of such questions or deal with it as invading their privacy. We found a small number of parents reported a combination of both secure and insecure attachment among their children. Although this finding seems illogical because it combines a pattern and its antipode at the same time, [18-37] and [4] both wrote that the child develops multiple attachments with different caregivers.
Given that the attachment relationship with one parent is defined by the child’s experience with that parent and may be qualitatively different than the child’s experience with the other parent, one can propose that those children have a secure attachment with one parent and an insecure attachment with the other, and the parent who completed the questionnaire might mix the child’s responses to both parents together instead of focusing on the child’s responses to him/her. Findings indicated no significant relation between both types of attachment and child’s gender [38].

This is consistent with the findings of [39] who found no significant differences related to gender on either the secure or insecure Scales. However, some other studies that used classifications for evaluating the story stem narratives found biases towards secure attachment in girls and towards insecure/disorganized classifications in boys [40,41]. This inconsistency could be related to differences in the way of collecting data. Those studies used observations while this study used questionnaires.

Regarding monthly income, results indicated that children of families with moderate income are insecurely attached to their mothers more than those of families with low income. This result can be explained simply that these children might be close to their fathers rather than their mothers, or results might be influenced by other factors including difficulty in regulating their children’s and their own emotions, low responsiveness and involvement, less play, lower responsibility, negative discipline, and verbal abuse [42], with long-term effects on children’s behavior [43].

Results indicated no significant relation between any of the four parenting patterns utilized in this study and secure attachment, while a significant relation was found between parenting styles and insecure attachment. Our study showed that parenting styles were not effective variables in developing secure attachment among preschoolers, and this finding was inconsistent with previous research. This finding is inconsistent with the findings of [11,44], who evidenced the relation between parenting styles together; insecure-anxious attachment was found to be positively related with all of flexible parenting pattern. The authoritative parenting style, and the pattern combining authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles together; insecure-unspecified attachment was related to authoritative parenting style and controlling-oriented pattern; and insecure-avoidant attachment was related to controlling-oriented pattern. Regarding the flexible pattern, results are consistent with Ainsworth’s findings who concluded that permissive parenting style is associated with insecure-anxious attachment, thus, one can attribute such a result to the utilization of permissive parenting style within this pattern.

Second: The instrument used in this study for measuring attachment. Structured interviews might influence the results. It might be that parents told what they value or what they believe as right and acceptable instead of telling the factual response of their child when reunited with them. Third: Parents own attachment to their parents as children and their romantic attachment to their spouse as adults. Studies in attachment research, in fact, have shown that children’s relationships with their parents are linked to the adults’ internal working models, which are the result of their history with attachment figures [45].

The study showed that insecure attachment in general was related to authoritative parenting style, controlling-oriented pattern, and pattern combining authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles together; insecure attachment with one parent and an insecure attachment with the other parent, one can propose that those children have a secure attachment with one parent and an insecure attachment with the other parent, and the parent who completed the questionnaire might mix the child’s responses to both parents together instead of focusing on the child’s responses to him/her. Findings indicated no significant relation between both types of attachment and child’s gender [38].
and many of their activities and duties, thus, for parents who live under multiple stressors like those living in the Gaza Strip, they might be utilized with high stress and anxiety provocation in parents. Anxious and stressed parents mainly mothers are expected to be unable to respond consistently to their child’s needs, to fail in encouraging exploration, and to have little if any communication with the child.

According to Ainsworth, insecure-ambivalent (akin to anxious) attachment is associated with mother’s lack of or inconsistent responsiveness and mother’s insensitivity to her baby’s needs, usually seen in withdrawn or depressed mothers. This proposition is consistent with [47] findings suggesting that responsive care giving for others in distress might be particularly difficult for those who are uncomfortable with emotional expression or who have difficulty regulating their own emotions, and these difficulties are associated with attachment insecurity.

Further, the authoritative parenting style in this study was found to be associated with insecure-unspecified attachment. Given that [39] showed that the items of unspecified attachment used in this study might be indicative of an organization stemming from ‘disorganized’ in infancy, and given that disorganized attachment is caused by parents who are frightened themselves or frightening their children, thus, the possible explanation for this relation is that those parents might verbally threaten their children to force them comply to their own orders and demands and not to follow through rules applied by others (for example, a member of the extended family) in order to keep their authoritative style.

Regarding the relation between insecure-anxious attachment and the pattern combining the authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, the cause might be inconsistent responsiveness. This is unsurprising because this pattern combines the three parenting styles together, thus, one can propose that those parents seem to utilize harsh physical punishment alternatively with neglect of the undesired behavior, and to provide warmth and care in one day then withdraw in another.

Regarding controlling-oriented pattern, it was found to be associated with both insecure-avoidant and insecure-unspecified attachment. Given that previous research [4] concluded that authoritarian parenting style is associated with insecure-avoidant attachment, its association with insecure-avoidant can be related to the utilization of the authoritarian parenting style within this pattern (a combination of Baumrind’s authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles). The other finding indicated its association with insecure-unspecified attachment. As mentioned, unspecified attachment was found to stem from insecure-disorganized attachment, and disorganization is caused by many parental practices, some of which are child abuse, maltreatment, and intrusive parenting.

Therefore, We proposes that those parents might utilize some form of child maltreatment such as psychological control or verbal abuse, both of which are not studied here, leading to the development of this attachment style. This proposition is consistent with what stated that authoritarian parents tend to be high in psychological control. In addition, in her recent work, [48] stated that “intrusive processes included in Barber’s Psychological Control Scale are markers of an authoritarian style of control, typically associated with poor adjustment”. However, it could be that results of this study are influenced by other variables along with parenting styles.

Some of these variables were included in this study. Results of this study found a significant relation between insecure attachment in general and father’s job, mother’s education, and monthly income. Other variables included in other studies and showed a significant relation with child-parent attachment include maternal mental illness [39], maternal expressed emotion [49], and child’s perception of his mother [50,51]. Other variables not previously included in any study might participate in this relation, thus, further examination of it is needed.

Study implications

The results of such study highlight the need for parental training of better ways of rearing practice of their children and increase communication with their children in their early years of life. Courses for single couples before marriage to encourage them of using better parenting styles to overcome their children problems. Also, education courses for parents about types of attachment and better ways of using health attachments with their children must be conducted [52-54].

We recommended other researchers to focus on studying attachment of preschool children in the Gaza Strip and the parenting styles of both their fathers and mothers using different instruments and procedures in order to thoroughly explore the relation between parenting styles and attachment [55]. To conduct research such as the relation between parenting styles and attachment of preschoolers using observations, the relation between mother’s adult attachment style and her child’s attachment, the impact of psychological control on child’s attachment.

Limitations of the study

There are some limitations in this study. The study included a sample from children registered at approved kindergartens and there are other preschool children weren't included. Questionnaires were completed by mothers and if it’s impossible for some reason, it was completed by the father. Father’s parenting styles and attachment of preschoolers with their fathers are not investigated by this study. Fathers’ exclusion is expected to be unable to respond consistently to their child’s needs, to fail in encouraging exploration, and to have little if any communication with the child.
thus, this study might be affected by the parents’ willingness to provide accurate information.

References

The Relation between Parenting Styles and Attachment among Preschool Children in the Gaza strip.


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