

Effectiveness of Parental Counseling in Parent-Child Relational Problems: A Quasi Experimental Research

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The present study aimed at measuring the effectiveness of parental counseling on parent child-relational problems. This study included ($N = 31$) parents including mothers ($n = 20$) and fathers ($n = 11$) from different cities of Punjab, Pakistan. The age of parents ranged between 31-52 years ($M = 38.63$, $SD = 12.36$). In a quasi-experimental design study; a pre-post assessment of parent-child relational problems was done by using 78-items Urdu version of Parent Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI). An indigenously developed 6 sessions' Parental Counseling Program was implemented to improve parent-child relational problems. Results of the paired sample t-test revealed significant differences in pre-post assessment. Parents in post-test significantly exhibited higher scores on support ($r = 2.73$), satisfaction ($r = 1.59$), Involvement ($r = .91$), communication ($r = 2.43$), limit setting ($r = 1.91$), autonomy ($r = 2.33$) and role orientation ($r = 3.36$) as compared to the pre-test results. In conclusion, parental counseling (and this ingeniously developed program) can play a significant role in improving parent-child relationships. The current study provides a counseling program for educational and school counselors, as a treatment process to improve parent-child relationship and consequently decrease the negative effects of parent-child relationship problems on children.

Keywords: Parental Counseling Program, counseling, parent-child relationship, quasi-experiment, parenting, counseling

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Healthy parenting is reflected by a healthy parent-child relationship but when parents fail to resolve the conflicts between themselves and their children; bad parenting practices emerge. There are several reasons behind parent-child conflicts which vary from culture to culture, event to event or home to home. In each culture, parents may need guidance and training at some point in their parenting experience to avoid unnecessary issues. Mostly, when they feel things are going out of their control they require learning some basic management skills. Hence, parental counseling and training helps them in developing healthy and successful parenting skills which consequently improves their relationship with their children (Maccoby, 2000).

Attitude towards parental counseling and several domains of parental counseling for conflict management affect the quality of parent-child relationships. Each parent-child relationship could be seen as a traditional independent approach to parenting. The course of variability in the relationship of parents with their children starts from early childhood till their youth, which can differ from culture to culture or era to era. Some researches and anthropological studies based on relationships over three generations; children, their parents and also their grandparents, showed a substantial diversity among various beliefs in each type of association (Rothbaum, Pott, Azuma, Miyake & Weisz, 2000; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003).

Continuous guidance and training of parents throughout the course of life; contributes in better biological and emotional development of the children. The differences in parent-child relations tend to occur because of age related responsibilities and locations (Berlin, 2004).

In each country and culture, most parenting goals and aims are universal and the same; they tend to be general and they should be fulfilled by all the parents (Amato, 2005; Moore, Jekielek & Emig, 2002). The main reason of differences in the norms of each

culture is independence. Psychologists who are working cross culturally on parent-child relationship; are developing a notion that the dependence of children comes to an end when full independence has been given to the child by parents (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005).

In most of the Asian cultures majority of the children, take up all kinds of social responsibilities of their parents and share their burdens after their occupational establishment so, that their parents won't suffer more in life. In contrast to that, in Western cultures after 18 years of age, children live independently, hold their work separately and make every decision of their life by themselves.

The same norms are found in Japan where children are trained in such a way that, in adulthood, they can be independent. Their parents give them autonomy as they want them to be independent, successful and accomplished in their goals (Van-Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988; Roopnarine & Carter, 1992). After analyzing all aspects of parent-child relationships, psychologists concluded that, when you become parents, the chances of having conflict with your children increase that is why parental counseling and training tends to be beneficial (Moore, Jekiele & Emig, 2002).

A research was conducted in Chinese, Eastern European and European Canadian families to examine dynamics of parent - child relationships and conflicts. Results of the study showed very few cultural differences, the major difference that was found was that, children and parents do not always share the same ways to resolve their conflicts. Eastern European fathers and children show a desire of constructive negotiation, whereas this desire was least in Chinese respondents. Still, the overall conclusion was that parent-child conflict is likely to unfold similarly across different cultural groups. (Anguelova, 2008). As compared to parents from North America, Chinese parents are more likely to be controlling and have more expectations about their children's obedience and

compliance. They expect their children to respect family values, respect parents and show discipline (Anguelova, 2008; Chao & Tseng, 2002; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Wu et. al., 2002). European-Canadian parents showed higher levels of satisfaction with conflict outcomes as compared to the Chinese. But in aspect of expression of affect, results support other studies on cultural differences (Eid & Diener, 2001; Leichtman, Wang, & Pillemer, 2003).

In this regard, Eyberg (1988) created the parent-child interaction therapy (PCIT) as a treatment of problematic interactions between parents and children. This therapy became popular because it was standardized in different cultures, and population groups. PCIT is widely used by researchers because it is quite effective and useful for the treatment of histrionic personality as well as other attention seeking behaviors. It is also used to treat children who have traumatic pasts, or have a conflict with their pre-adoptive parents (Fricker-Elhai, Ruggiero, & Smith, 2005; Herschell & McNeil, 2005).

The essence of PCIT based on operant conditioning is that therapists guide the parents to give rewards and punishment for certain desirable and undesirable behaviors of their offspring. The unique property of this therapy is that it has a planned set of techniques and a regularity plan, which is proved to be very effective in the relationships between children and parents. PCIT is also used for different types of behavior modification in children by resolving their problems with their parents (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2007).

After years of practice with children, Landreth (2002) firmly concluded that if parents learn skills and tactics reflected by the environment. Then they can help their children in child-centered play therapy sessions (Landreth & Bratton, 2006; Watts & Broaddus, 2002). The central idea of child-centered play therapy is that parents can understand the thinking, needs and views of the child whose words and language, exposed by their toys, can easily lead the parents to access their desires (Landreth, 2002).

Rogers worked with children for the treatment of different issues regarding their relationship with parents and he frequently used child-centered therapy. CCPT works on the rules of giving unconditioned positive regard to the children which is very effective in treating many psychological problems. Besides treating psychological problems, the child-centered therapists could be used to develop a good rapport with their client (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2007). Hence, the current research aims to develop an indigenous parent child counseling program while adapting the techniques provided by PCIT and CCPT.

Most of the researches about parent-child relationship were conducted in Western countries, while in Pakistan relatively fewer studies have been conducted which are directly or indirectly based on parent-child relationship. A research was conducted on the subject to explore the psychological development of the child as predicted by the intention of parents and the specific kind of family structure in which the child is brought up. Results revealed that according to the type of family, every child expresses different perceptions regarding parenting style. Children from well-adjusted families evaluated themselves as being less hostile, more autonomous, with higher levels of self-confidence, better self-esteem, and feelings of accomplishment. They saw their parents as warm and accepting at a higher level. Children from step parent families evaluated themselves as hostile, dependent, emotionally unstable and were more likely to see their parents as negative and rejecting. Children who live in a single-parent family are similar to the dynamics of children from both-parent families (Riaz, 1991).

Rationale of the Study

To develop a child's sound and healthy personality, it is necessary for parents to adapt to the changing norms of society in order to decrease the possibilities of future conflicts with their children. We are living in a diverse society that is more challenging in terms of the changing socio-political scenario; and

for the adolescences' psychological welfare, healthy parenting behaviours and strong family bonds are very important. However the issue is that the majority of researches about parent-child relationships have been conducted in Western societies (Bell & Eyberg, 2002; Herschell & Mcneil, 2005) which lack the indigenous cultural sensitivity.

Parents and families are the most important socializing agents for the psychological development of children. In Pakistan, parental counseling or parent trainings is not culturally appreciated. Therefore, at the time of risk, families reach higher levels of risk because of the absence of professional guidance and consultation. Moreover, in Western countries, many researchers have examined the effectiveness of different counseling methods in dealing with parent-child relational problems (Gallagher, 2003; Landreth & Bratton, 2006), but there are limited researches conducted in indigenous perspectives. Therefore, the current study was aimed to draw the attention to this very significant aspect of the family dynamics by evaluating the effectiveness of parental counseling program on the effects of parent-child relational problems.

Hypotheses

In the light of above mentioned literature it is being hypothesized that: a) Parental counseling program will improve parenting behavior of participants, and b) Parent-child relational problems will be reduced after parental counseling.

Method

Research Design

To conduct this study a pre-test post-test quasi experimental design was used in which participants were studied before and after the intervention. Single experimental group was used in the current study, and although it has less internal validity, it is acceptable for clinical or counseling studies, where laboratory experiments cannot be conducted (Bryman, 2008; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). In this research design participants (parents)

were analyzed through PCRI before they attended a self-developed indigenous parental counseling program and were retested using PCRI to measure the effect of counseling program. Furthermore, it is also evident by the literature that this intervention has higher external validity as it can be replicated in the real world (Dimsdale & Kutner, 2004).

Moreover, it has been observed that this design has less ethical issues such as abuse, deception and also encourages constructive involvement with participants.

Sample

The sample of the current study was ($N = 31$) parents with mothers ($n = 20$, 64.5%) and fathers ($n = 11$, 35.5%), age ranging from 31-52 years ($M = 38.63$, $SD = 12.36$), and approached through purposive convenient sampling. Sample was collected from different schools of Sargodha district.

The inclusion criteria for the participants, was that they should have children 3-14 years of age, which was also the prerequisite for the usage of PCRI. Moreover, parents who had any kind of psychological dysfunction or who were drug abusers were excluded from the study. Parents were pretested using PCRI and only those parents were selected who were having problems in three or more domains of PCRI. The details of the demographics of the participants are given in the table below.

Table 1
Table of Participants' Demographics (N = 31).

Variables	Mothers (n = 20)		Fathers (n = 11)		Total f(%)
	f	%age	f	%age	
Marital Status					
Married	19	61.29	11	35.48	31(96.77)
Divorced	01	03.22	-	-	01(3.22)
Education					
High School	08	25.80	03	09.67	11(35.47)
Graduation	10	32.25	03	09.67	13(41.92)
Masters& Above	02	06.45	05	16.13	07(22.58)
Occupation					
Unemployed	15	48.38	-	-	15(48.38)
Self-employed	-	-	06	19.35	06(19.35)
Job Holder	05	16.13	05	16.13	10(32.26)
Income (PKR)					
NA	15	48.38	-	-	15(48.38)
< 20,000	01	03.22	-	-	01(03.22)
30,000-50,000	03	09.67	08	25.80	11(35.47)
60,000-80,000	01	03.22	02	06.45	03(09.67)
>1,00,000	-	-	01	03.22	01(03.22)

The above-mentioned table provides the details of the participants regarding their demographic variables.

Measures

Following measures were used in the current study:

Parent child relationship inventory (PCRI). To screen out the cases of parent-child relational problems Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (Gerard, 1994) comprised of 78-items was used after Urdu translation. The inventory has seven content scales: Parental Support scale (SUP), Satisfaction with Parenting scale (SAT), Involvement scale (INV), Communication scale (COM),

Limit Setting scale (LIM), Autonomy scale (AUT) and Role Orientation scale (ROL). High scores on inventory indicate positive parenting. A study reported internal consistencies ranging from .61 to .80 (median=.77) on a sample of heroin-addicted mothers (Suchman, McMahon, & Luthar, 2004).

As, PCRI was available in English, there was a need to translate it in Urdu to use it in the indigenous Pakistani cultural context. The translation was done in the following steps as given by Brislin (1986).

Forward translation of PCRI was done from English to Urdu with the help of five MPhil and PhD Subject Matter Experts (SME) from the University of Sargodha, Pakistan; who were familiar with the translation procedure and had complete command in both languages. They were instructed to conserve the original scale as much as possible while keeping the cultural context in the consideration. b) Next, the *Committee Approach* was used to select or retain the items with the help of three PhD faculty members from the Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha. The items were systematically examined and analyzed with minute precision and the most suitable and comprehensive Urdu items were retained, which also reflected cultural perspectives. After the detailed deliberation of the committee, a preliminary Urdu version of PCRI was established. c) Following this, the backward translation of the Urdu version was done by utilizing the same procedure and precautions of the first step to attain consistencies between both versions (Brislin, 1986; Berkanovic, 1980). d) Again, the committee approach was used to compare the original and translated versions of PCRI and the findings showed that the translated version of PCRI had content similarity with original scale and the language was also according to the Pakistani culture and was comprehensive for the common people.

Procedure

The sample was collected from different schools of Sargodha district. Teachers and administrative staff worked as key informers of the parents of children with 3-14 years of age as per requirement of PCRI. In the first step, parents were approached through purposive convenient sampling. They were informed about purpose of research and ethical considerations in detail. After their consent PCRI was administered and scored for screening parent-child relational problems. Screened out sample was approached again personally and $N=31$ gave consent for participation in parental counseling program. A six-week counseling program was administered and post testing was done. The details of the counseling program are given in the following table 2. In the end parents were acknowledged and appreciated for their cooperation.

Table 2

Details of the Six-Week Parent-child Relationship Counseling Program

Week	Objectives	Techniques	Proposed Outcome
1 st	Positive Discipline	Praising, Encouragement and effective Punishment	Organized and disciplined personality of a child
2 nd	Imparting Responsibility in children	Parental modeling & using age specific tasks for children	Development of social role orientation and responsibility
3 rd	Communication with Children	Active listening & effective commands	Fulfillment of a child's emotional needs and effective parent-child communication
4 th	Setting limits	Reinforcement and age specific limits	Healthy and clear boundaries between parent and children
5 th	Behavior Management	Unconditional positive regard, effective use of rewards and punishment	Effective management of disruptive behaviors
6 th	Developing healthy PC Relations	Empathy, Adaptability	Strong parent-child bond

Table 2 shows an overview of parent counseling program, its objectives, techniques and proposed outcomes. This program was indigenously developed on the basis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected from parents regarding aspects of parent-child relational problems. The program followed an eclectic approach which involved certain cognitive, behavioral and

humanistic techniques to teach parents effective skills for healthy parent-child relationships. Prior researches have shown that psycho educational group counseling programs help participants learn certain social skills in a better way. And combined use of cognitive and behavioral approaches yields better outcomes in a short span of time (Brooks-Harris, 2008; Hinchman, 2015).

Results

The scores of pre and post PCRI were compared with the help of paired sample t-test and the results are reported in the following Table 3.

Table 3
Pre-post Parent-Child Relationship paired sample t-tests (N= 31)

Scales	Pretest		Posttest		95% CI				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> (30)	<i>p</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>R</i>
PCRI	185.2	14.02	236.8	8.96	27.81	.0	47.82	55.40	4.38
Support	20.65	03.41	28.81	2.48	18.64	.01	07.26	09.05	2.73
Satisfaction	26.35	03.45	32.03	3.69	07.86	.05	04.20	07.15	1.59
Involvement	41.03	07.44	46.42	3.86	04.80	.01	03.09	07.76	0.91
Communication	22.10	03.59	29.52	2.37	16.01	.01	06.47	08.36	2.43
Limit Setting	29.45	05.38	37.94	3.25	09.55	.01	06.67	10.29	1.91
Autonomy	24.45	03.98	32.71	3.04	16.19	.01	07.21	09.30	2.33
Role orientation	21.23	02.44	29.45	2.44	21.09	.01	07.42	09.02	3.36

Note. CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit *r*= Cohen's *d*

Significant large differences were found between the pre and post scores of PCRI and its subscales. In post-test parents exhibited significantly higher scores of support, satisfaction, involvement, communication, limit setting, autonomy, role orientation and parent-child relationship as compared to pre-test scores.

Discussion

The current research was aimed to find out the effectiveness of indigenously developed Parent Counseling Program on parent-child relational problems and the findings revealed that the program was significantly effective in decreasing the parent-child relational problems.

The main purpose of developing and conducting the Parent Counseling Program was to give awareness to parents about positive parenting, warmth and supportive attitude, effective communication and training that is necessary for the mental and social development process of child. The components of parent counseling program were about personal, social, educational, and career development of the children. Therefore, this program aids the parent to build a bond with their children, and also guides them to understand the needs, abilities, motivation, fantasies and their reactions to everyday problems. To create an environment in the family that would result in the positive growth and development of their children, parents should develop some skills and knowledge that help them to do so (Morrin, 2016).

However, skills and training that require to develop a friendly family and to create positive environment vary from culture to culture and also from family to family. Hence, the present study provides a new parent counseling program that is aimed to solve the parent child relationship problem in Pakistan. Being an Islamic country all the rules and obligations are observed according to the Islamic culture and children are supposed to obey the parent's orders.

Teaching parents becomes necessary as some parents expect too much of their children and others expect too little. Hence, sometimes parents have some unrealistic expectations from their children, due to which they respond by scolding, levying punishment and carrying out excessive discipline of their children (Mowder, 2006).

The findings of the study provide evidence that the parental counseling program is effective for parents with relationship problems and provides positive ways of dealing with their children. Parents learnt new skills of positive parenting; and finally, parents were able to communicate better with their child about different issues. The results of the post-test analysis of PCRI scores, demonstrated that the current counseling program is an effective and useful tool to deal with parent-child relational problems (see Table 3). All the domains came up with very high effect sizes except the involvement subscale which revealed medium level of effect size. A large body of research discloses that improvements in parental involvement after parental counseling and therapies vary across different samples. Moreover, studies confirm that effect sizes of parental involvement in pretest and posttest studies lie in between low to medium (Chaote, Pincus, Eyeberg & Barlow, 2005; Comer et al., 2012).

Hence, this study not only provides insight for parental counseling and also provides an indigenously developed counseling program that is effective for reducing parent-child conflicts.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, there is very limited awareness about parental training and counseling programs and parents rarely take any help at professional level when things get out of control. The present study was carried out to measure the effectiveness of indigenously developed parental counseling in parent-child relational problems in Pakistan. Results of the paired sample t-test revealed that this Parent Counseling Program is effective for reducing the parent-child relationship problems.

Limitations and Future Suggestions

Although the study brought in significant findings with reference to parent-child relationships and effectiveness of parental guidance and training in dealing with relationship issues, yet there are certain limitations of the study which can be improved in future replications.

The present counseling program used parent directed approach only. Although the results were promising but future counselors and researchers can also use it in combination of child directed and teacher directed interventions in order to get more improvements in shorter time durations.

The study has not compared the compatibility of this counseling program with other significant treatment approaches in the field i.e. Filial therapy, CPRT and PCIT. Future researches can include the comparative approach in measuring significant differences. The qualitative or case study approach could also prove to be helpful in this regard.

Implications

This program is helpful for counselors, therapist and social workers to deal with parent-child conflicts and other relationship issues and to create awareness about healthy parenting.

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