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# **Family Factors Associated with Anxiety in Children**

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## *Abstract*

The present study investigated the impact of the family environment to emotional and behavioural problems in children's lives. Various hypotheses were related to how the family environment differs for internalising and externalising problems in children, and in turn how the family environment related to the specific emotional disturbances of anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder in children. Also, the role of the family environment as a moderator in the relationship between anxiety and depression.

A number of hypotheses related to obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) were not able to be investigated in the present study due to small sample size. Included in these hypotheses were Rapoport's (1989) theorised developmental pathway of ritualisation in children and Kashani et al.'s (1992) theorised three subgroups of obsessive compulsive disorder. In addition, DSM-IV's theorised distinction between children that have, or do not have, insight into their obsessive-compulsive symptomatology. However, the hypothesis regarding the relationship obsessive-compulsive problems had with internalising and externalising problems were assessed in the present study. Other hypotheses included the relationship children experiencing anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive problems had to children's coping strategies. Coping strategies then, were also investigated in regard to their relationship with the family environment. Finally, significant life events were evaluated in terms of their relationship with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder, while another hypotheses were related to coping strategies as a moderator in the relationship between anxiety and depression.

The sample consisted of seventy-two children and forty-nine parents, using a multitrait, multimethod battery of measures. Correlational analyses, including the use of multiple regression, indicated that the family environment was indeed related to internalising and externalising problems, as well as anxiety, depression and OCD in children. The family environment also moderated the relationship between anxiety and depression. In addition, findings indicated that OCD predicted externalising problems while anxiety predicted both internalising and externalising problems. The family environment was also found to relate to children's coping strategies, as was anxiety and OCD. Finally, anxiety and OCD were indicated to relate to significant life events. These results are

discussed in terms of other research literature, their implications for treatment and future research.

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Mum, my soul mate. My only wish is that some day I will be the kind of woman you are to me. You taught me how to hold my hands up high and reach for the sun. Without the wisdom of your indomitable spirit I would not be writing this today. To Dad, thank you for the support and security you have always provided for me, I love you.

To all the children, I wish you safe journeys of discovery and wonderment. Should your light ever become shaded and you need some help in finding the way, be assured someone is here. Thank you also to all the parents who patiently and diligently filled in all the questionnaires. Your mighty effort was much appreciated, I only hope it was in some way beneficial to you and your family.

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Finally, a quote which aptly tells the tale of my last year of research and assessment...

*"Far better to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered with failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the grey twilight that knows not victory, nor defeat."*

Theodore Roosevelt, 1899.

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