

A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL REARING, DYSFUNCTIONAL ATTITUDES AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

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Our conceptualization of the occurrence of mental disorders and of their further course and outcome is that they are multidetermined. Cultural, biological, psychological, and social factors are assumed to interact in determining a specific individual vulnerability. A model built on this basic postulate, explained in detail elsewhere (1) takes into account not only the multiple factors which contribute in making a particular person more or less vulnerable to the impact of external events, but also the continuous interplay of the individual and his environment. Crucial for this interplay are what kind of self-concept the individual has been able to develop and how he sees himself in relation to his environment. In other words what kind of self-schema the individual has been able to construct and which type of personal rules of life the individual follows.

Experiences made in the contact with one's own parents during upbringing, probably represent one of the most powerful determinants of an individual's self-concept. Hence, those experiences might be assumed to largely contribute to the development of individual vulnerability, and, consequently to the development of psychopathological manifestations.

During this last decade, a large, multicultural study of possible relationships between the subjective experience of parental rearing attitudes and psychopathological disorders of a various type has been implemented at the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Mental Health at Umeå, Sweden. In this context, a finding that has consistently emerged across ethnical boundaries, has been the report by depression-prone subjects of having experienced the rearing attitudes of their parents negatively. For example, when contrasted with healthy subjects they seem to have experienced their parents, mothers in particular, as lacking 'emotional warmth' and being 'rejecting' (table 1).

TABLE 1

EMBU factor scores in euthymic former depressed patients and in controls (mean  $\pm$  SD) by nation

GROUP	MOTHERS					
	Rejection		Emotional warmth		Overprotection	
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
<u>Hungarian</u>						
Depressives (50)	42.8 $\pm$	8.2***	46.8 $\pm$	9.7***	38.2 $\pm$	8.3**
Controls (200)	39.1 $\pm$	8.0	55.8 $\pm$	8.1	35.5 $\pm$	7.4
<u>German</u>						
Depressives (243)	40.7 $\pm$	12.9***	45.6 $\pm$	10.6***	36.0 $\pm$	7.9*
Controls (251)	35.5 $\pm$	6.7	52.2 $\pm$	8.3	34.3 $\pm$	5.8
<u>Swedish</u>						
Depressives (141)	35.6 $\pm$	9.2	47.2 $\pm$	11.2***	32.3 $\pm$	6.9**
Controls (205)	36.3 $\pm$	8.8	51.9 $\pm$	8.7	34.7 $\pm$	7.7
<u>Italian</u>						
Depressives (52)	38.6 $\pm$	5.7	38.9 $\pm$	3.0***	34.1 $\pm$	4.4
Controls (200)	35.5 $\pm$	10.1	48.8 $\pm$	10.4	34.7 $\pm$	7.0

\* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

In addition, inline with our conception, an interaction seems to occur between the occurrence of an affective disorder in either of the parents and the individual's experience of a dysfunctional parental attitude (Table 2).

TABLE 2

EMBU scores (mean  $\pm$  SD) in euthymic former depressed patients with or without an affectively ill parent.

	Ill parent (n=40)		No ill parent (n=72)		
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
REJECTION					
Father	38.3	11.5	34.3	9.4	<.05
Mother	37.8	10.6	34.4	8.3	<.05
EMOTIONAL WARMTH					
Father	44.3	11.0	46.5	10.6	
Mother	45.3	12.0	47.7	10.3	<.05
OVERPROTECTION					
Father	30.5	7.7	30.1	7.0	
Mother	32.6	7.3	32.4	6.9	

In an attempt to identify a possible link between the experience of a parental dysfunctional rearing attitude and the occurrence of psychopathological manifestations, a model has been suggested (1) which takes into account the development of a dysfunctional self-schema (fig. 1).

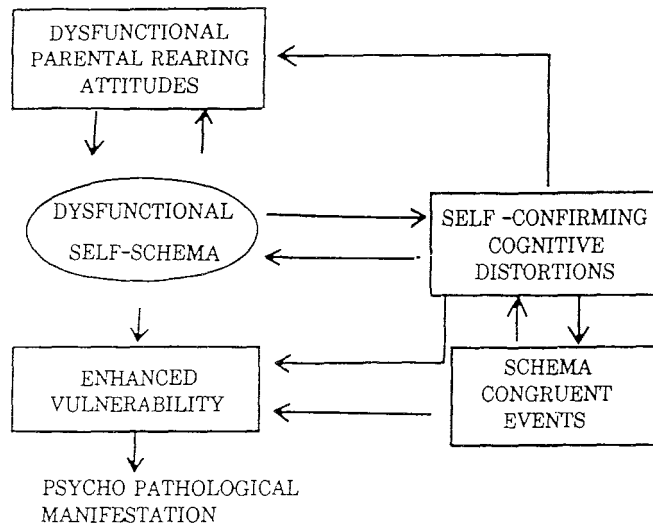


Fig. 1. A conceptual model for linking experiences of parental dysfunctional rearing attitudes and psychopathology.

Our empirical basis in conceiving the model depicted in figure 1 consisted of some preliminary findings obtained in healthy subjects, which suggested a possible relationship between measures of the experience of parental attitudes and measures of dysfunctional basic assumptions or dysfunctional self-schema (1). In view of those findings, it was decided that subjects participating in the multinational study of parental rearing attitudes and psychopathology should also complete a measure of basic dysfunctional assumptions. In the present article, a preliminary analysis of the data collected in a few national settings will be presented whereas a more detailed description of the study will be reported in a forthcoming paper.

Briefly, euthymic, former non-bipolar depressed patients from DDR, Romania and Sweden completed both the EMBU ('Egna Minnen av BarndomsUppfostran') (2), and the Form A of the DAS ('Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale') (3).

In previous studies of the psychometric characteristics of the EMBU, it has been found that the aspects of upbringing tapped by the EMBU collapse into three

components: rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection. In addition, it has been shown that those dimensions are replicable across similar populations and invariant across distinct ones (4). In the present study, scores obtained on the three dimensions just mentioned have been correlated with scores obtained on the DAS. Also as concerns DAS, three factors are taken into account: 1) Depressogenic information processing; 2) Perfectionistic attitude; and 3) Self-esteem depending on approval from others (5). The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
Correlations between EMBU factor scores and DAS (A) in euthymic former depressed patients by national sample

	GDR n=44	Romania n=37	Sweden n=30
FACTOR 1			
<u>Father</u>			
Rejection	.40**	.53***	.08
Emotional warmth	-.18	-.24	-.56***
Overprotection	.28*	.15	-.11
<u>Mother</u>			
Rejection	.34*	.34*	.09
Emotional warmth	-.20	-.09	-.50***
Overprotection	.25*	.18	.10
FACTOR 2			
<u>Father</u>			
Rejection	.35*	.42**	.15
Emotional warmth	.09	-.05	-.44**
Overprotection	.29*	.12	.31*
<u>Mother</u>			
Rejection	.23	.05	.15
Emotional warmth	.02	.10	-.47**
Overprotection	.24*	.11	.24*
FACTOR 3			
<u>Father</u>			
Rejection	-.05	-.13	.27*
Emotional warmth	.05	-.05	-.41**
Overprotection	.26*	-.10	.29*
<u>Mother</u>			
Rejection	.24	.29*	.39*
Emotional warmth	-.32*	.24	-.46**
Overprotection	.38*	-.09	.38*

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

FACTOR 1 = DEPRESSOGENIC INFORMATION PROCESSING

FACTOR 2 = PERFECTIONISTIC ATTITUDES

FACTOR 3 = SELF-ESTEEM DEPENDING UPON APPROVAL OF OTHERS

The results presented in table 3 support the hypothesis that a significant relationship exists between having experienced the rearing attitudes of one's own parents as dysfunctional and the development of basic dysfunctional assumptions or dysfunctional personal rules of life. High scores on the DAS are consistently found in depression-prone individuals, and strongly correlate with other measures of dysfunctional cognitions. They contribute, when the individual is exposed to the impact of stressful external events to the development of a depressive syndrome (6, 7). Hence, even though the evidence presented at this junction is only based on correlations, a link seems to exist between dysfunctional rearing practices and manifest psychopathology. Such a link seems to consist of a dysfunctional self-concept characterized by a negative view of self and of one's own relationship to the environment.

## REFERENCES

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