

The Impact of Parenting Styles and Attachment Styles on Neuroticism Levels

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Abstract: The level of neuroticism is a crucial indicator for assessing an individual's emotional stability when confronted with stress and is also regarded as closely associated with health. In the studies of this personality trait, the influential factors that cannot be overlooked are the parenting style during childhood and the attachment style in intimate relationships. This paper aims to investigate the influence of parenting styles and attachment styles on an individual's level of neuroticism. Through the method of literature review, this research analyzes relevant studies and summarizes the definitions and measurement methods of the above three concepts, as well as their relationships and the mechanism of action. The research reveals that parenting styles and attachment styles have a significant impact on the level of neuroticism. The authoritative parenting style and the secure attachment style are conducive to reducing the level of neuroticism and promoting individual mental health; while the authoritarian, neglectful parenting styles and the anxious, avoidant attachment styles may result in an elevated level of neuroticism and increase the risk of mental health issues.

1 INTRODUCTION

Neuroticism, one of the Big Five personality traits, indicates the likelihood of an individual reacting negatively to stressful events — they experience a lot of fear, anxiety, and sadness. There is no doubt that studies regarding neuroticism have offered valuable results that health officials can implement in the public health system. An elevated level of neuroticism is more likely to be associated with pathology and emotional disturbances, both of which negatively affect people's mental state and overall happiness. Identifying the explanatory factors and underlying influencing mechanisms for neuroticism will contribute to the creation of effective preventive and therapeutic interventions for mood disorders, thus leading to better outcomes.

This paper will focus on two concepts, which are related to neuroticism, as they have been extensively studied: parenting and attachment styles. While parenting styles refer to behavioral and emotional tendencies manifested by parents, attachment styles reflect the modes of emotional communication and interaction used by an individual in relationships. Parenting styles and attachment styles are both prevalent in early childhood, and these two factors

have a sustained potency during the course of an individual's psychological growth.

This study sought to look into the impact of parenting style and attachment style on neuroticism. More specifically, this paper will explore which parenting and attachment styles contribute to the formation of high levels of neuroticism, as well as the way these factors operate. By understanding the relationship mechanism between parenting style, attachment style, and neuroticism, this study can provide valuable insights for optimizing parenting strategies and promoting individual mental health, retrieving subjectivity and belonging in intimate relationships, and realizing personality integrity and self-consistency.

2 INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH SUBJECTS

2.1 Parental Rearing Style

Parental style refers to the behavioral tendencies, emotional atmosphere, and educational attitudes that parents exhibit in raising and educating their children. This parenting style is stable across time and situations and profoundly impacts children's

psychological development and behavior patterns (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Baumrind classified parenting style into three patterns: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Baumrind, 1971). The permissive style was later divided into indulgent and neglectful (or uninvolved) types.

The interaction pattern between parents and children can be evaluated by two dimensions: Responsiveness and Demandingness (McCoby, 1983). "Responsiveness" involves parents actively engaging in communicating with their children, showing care and concern, providing emotional and practical support, and fulfilling the child's specific needs. "Demandingness" includes setting clear rules and boundaries, monitoring the child's activities, establishing expectations, and making children responsible and competitive enough for society.

Authoritative parenting is high in both demandingness and responsiveness, parents set clear and reasonable standards for their children's behavior while being supportive and encouraging, explain the reasons behind the rules and are willing to share opinions with their children (Baumrind, 1991).

In Authoritarian parenting, which is high in demandingness but low in responsiveness, parents impose strict rules and expect obedience without much explanation or flexibility, they often use controlling methods such as scolding, corporal punishment, and psychological control (Baumrind, 1991).

Indulgent (Permissive) parenting is marked by low demandingness but high responsiveness. Parents are lenient and often take on more of a friend role rather than an authority figure. They have few expectations for self-control and maturity from their children (Baumrind, 1991).

Neglectful (Uninvolved) Parenting is characterized by low demandingness and low responsiveness, parents neither set behavioral standards nor provide emotional support. They may be insensitive to their children's needs and emotional reactions, leading to feelings of neglect for their children emotionally and behaviorally (Baumrind, 1991).

Some scholars have also divided the parenting style into different dimensions, such as warmth (such as acceptance, displays of affection, and positive feedback), behavioral control (such as enforcing rules, setting regulations, and supervision), and psychological control (such as invasiveness, manipulation through guilt) (Barber et al., 2005). In general, parental warmth and behavioral control are associated with better psychosocial functioning (for example, competence, self-regulation, and academic

success), whereas psychological control is associated with impairments in psychosocial development (Barber et al., 2005).

The Parenting Style Questionnaire (Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran, or EMBU) was developed by Swiss scholars in the 1980s to measure parents' parenting styles. Respondents are asked to reflect on their parents' behavior toward them during their upbringing (Perris et al., 1980). The standard version of EMBU includes four primary dimensions: Overprotection, Emotional Warmth, Rejection, and Favoritism. EMBU has been revised and applied in many countries because of its good reliability and validity (Huang et al., 1996, Rapee, 1997).

2.2 Attachment Style

The attachment style is formed in infancy and early childhood, it continues to influence individuals throughout their whole lives. After birth, attachment can be described as the special emotional bonding between infants and their caregivers, such as the immediate provision of water, food, and comfort when the baby cries. As the individual develops and becomes mature, the objects of attachment gradually shift from parents to friends and romantic partners. The patterns of emotional interaction in intimate relationships are, to a significant extent, shaped by early experiences during infancy.

Freud pointed out that the interaction of infants with their parents affects human relationships in adulthood (Freud, 1905). Harlow demonstrated, through the "wire mother" and "cloth mother" experiments, that maternal love requires emotional care and not just physical satisfaction (Harlow, 1962). Bowlby developed attachment theory on this basis, emphasizing the importance of the safe base provided by caregivers for emotional development (Bowlby, 1969). Ainsworth identified secure, avoidant, and resistant attachment styles through the "unfamiliar situation" experiment, further confirming the impact of early parent-child interaction on subsequent relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

For adults, the distinguishing feature of attachment relationships is that individuals will rely on a specific person when they feel threatened or insecure. People have a stable pattern of cognitions about themselves, significant others, and interpersonal relationships, which gradually become part of their personality characteristics as they grow up and fully socialize (Rholes, 2004).

2.3 Neuroticism

Personality traits quantify significant differences in a person's typical responses to their environment that distinguish one person from another (Mischel, 2004). Neuroticism personality traits refer to a relatively stable tendency to react negatively emotionally to threats, setbacks, or losses. There is considerable variation among people in this trait, with some individuals exhibiting frequent and intense emotional reactions to minor difficulties, while others may show little to no emotional response even in the face of major adversities (Lahey, 2009). While the term "neuroticism" originated from Freudian theory, as well as in the historical philosophical and medical traditions that underpin psychodynamic models, the modern concept of "neurotic" has evolved. Today, it is not linked to the concept of unconscious conflict but is instead defined in purely descriptive, psychometric terms.

Neuroticism can be characterized by a range of attributes involving irritability, anger, sadness, anxiety, worry, hostility, heightened self-awareness, and emotional vulnerability. These traits have been found to exhibit significant correlations with each other through factor analysis (Costa & McCrae, 1992, Goldberg, 1993). In addition, people with high neuroticism are often inclined to be self-critical, feel sensitive to criticism from others, and experience a sense of personal insufficiency (Watson et al., 1994). This dimension of personality, commonly known as negative emotions or affectivity, is integrated into almost all prominent personality trait models (Matthews, 2003). A common personality model is the three-factor model (Eysenck, 1991, Tellegen, 1982). A five-factor model has also been proposed (Costa & McCrae, 1992, Goldberg, 1993, Zuckerman et al., 1993).

An extensive review consistently shows that high neuroticism is a critical contributor to the emergence of depressive disorders (Ormel et al., 2013, Klein et al., 2011). The DSM-5 emphasizes that neuroticism serves as an influential component in the development of major depression (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is therefore understandable that a person's personality traits, especially neuroticism, are strongly linked to the risk or tendency to develop depression.

3 THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL REARING STYLE ON NEUROTICISM LEVEL

Over the past few years, many studies have been dedicated to exploring the connection between parenting styles and neuroticism. There are several studies that have generally shown that neuroticism, irritability, distrust, hostility, and other forms of negative emotions expressed in individuals are associated with a lack of warmth and a tendency to experience negative parenting, while agreeableness, extroversion, and conscientiousness are associated with more positive and adaptive parenting. Neuroticism was positively associated with retrospective recall of controlled parenting and negatively associated with parental warmth (Reti et al., 2002, Ayoub et al., 2019).

3.1 Empirical Studies Overview

Averina et al. carried out an online questionnaire survey among 228 young individuals aged 18 to 25 residing in the Jakarta Metropolitan Area and discovered that parental care and protection exerted a significant influence on neuroticism levels (Averina et al., 2021). Specifically, as the degree of parental affection rose, neuroticism declined. Conversely, as the level of overprotection increased, neuroticism levels also rose, suggesting that parents have a crucial impact on child development by providing positive affirmation, love, and respect.

Ono et al. focused on 401 Japanese adult volunteers and inquired about their neuroticism, parenting style, and life experiences through a self-filling questionnaire (Ono et al., 2017). The findings indicated that inadequate parental nurturing coupled with excessive parental overprotection during the childhood period were found to elevate neuroticism traits in adulthood, which in turn indirectly affected depressive symptoms.

Yu et al. followed 290 European American adolescents for 9 years to explore how adolescent self-efficacy and parenting styles affect optimism and neuroticism in early adulthood (Yu et al., 2019). Studies have found that parental behaviors characterized by heightened psychological control and lax behavioral regulation can reduce adolescents' self-efficacy, which in turn leads to decreased optimism and heightened neuroticism during early adulthood. Especially in an authoritarian family environment, the warm influence of the mother may be diminished by the authoritarian parenting style.

This dynamic exacerbates adolescents' sense of helplessness and loss of control, thereby further elevating their neuroticism levels.

In China, Qian Mingyi and Xia Guohua conducted a study on 79 high school students and found that parents' severe punishment, overprotection, and denial tendency were associated with their children's anxiety and worry emotional responses through questionnaire survey (Qian & Xia, 1996). Liu Jinhong conducted a study on 113 college students and found that neuroticism was exhibited a positive correlation with paternal refusal to deny, the mother's excessive interference and overprotection, and negatively linked with paternal understanding and emotional warmth (Liu, 2008).

Xu Dong conducted a study on 300 junior high school students by using the Parenting Style Assessment Scale (EMBU) and the State-Trait Anxiety Scale (STAI) and found that children's trait anxiety level was negatively correlated with parents' understanding of emotional warmth, while positively correlated with father's overprotection and mother's preference (Xu, 2002). The study also pointed out that there were differences in parents' parenting styles, with fathers scoring higher on the factors of harshness of punishment and preference, and mothers scoring higher on the factors of denial and denial.

3.2 Summary of Findings

Through a thorough examination of these studies, it becomes evident that there exists a notable relationship between parenting styles and the levels of neuroticism exhibited by individuals. Averina et al. showed that the degree of parental care and protection was inversely correlated with neuroticism, while overprotection exhibited a direct positive correlation with neuroticism. Ono et al. observed that insufficient parental care combined with heightened overprotection in childhood increased neuroticism levels in adulthood and indirectly influenced depressive symptoms. Yu et al. pointed out that excessive psychological control and loose behavioral control by parents can reduce adolescents' self-efficacy, which in turn affects levels of optimism and neuroticism in early adulthood. Chinese studies have also come to similar conclusions. For example, Qian Mingyi and Xia Guohua found that severe punishment and overprotection are related to children's anxiety and worry; Liu Jinhong and Xu Dong also confirmed the positive or negative correlation between different parenting styles and children's neuroticism. These studies have arrived at a unified understanding regarding the general effect

of parenting style on neuroticism, but there are differences in the specific mechanism and influencing factors. For instance, Yu and colleagues highlighted the mediating function of self-efficacy, while alternative research endeavors have primarily concentrated on the immediate consequences of parenting styles themselves.

3.3 Methodological Considerations

The study broadly follows the questionnaire survey approach. Online questionnaire survey tools were utilized by Averina et al., whereas self-filled questionnaires and integrated multiple scales were applied by Ono et al. for a broader evaluation. Yu et al. used the design method of longitudinal tracking in a scientific study, and the multiple surveys were utilized to discover the area of dynamics between variables. For instance, the Parenting Style Rating Scale and the State Trait Anxiety Scale were presented in questionnaires, as they were used by Chinese researchers to measure the appropriate variables.

3.4 Strengths and Limitations

These studies included people from different stages of life and geographical locations, and the heterogeneity of subjects constituted a significant ground for discovering the particularity and commonality of parenting styles' influence on neuroticism. The longitudinal study approach increased the internal validity of the research and afforded the opportunity to scrutinize the connection between parenting styles and neuroticism in a more rounded manner.

Nevertheless, some problems persist. To illustrate, several studies that employ self-reported measurement tools may be extremely prone to subjective biases, which might be due to the power of social expectations. Additionally, the sample may have a trimmed representation collection and not be able to generalize issues associated with different cultural and social contexts. Furthermore, these studies give less consideration to other factors, such as genetics and environment.

In conclusion, these studies revealed the significant impact of parenting style on neuroticism level, but there were some limitations in study design, sample selection, and methodology. Future research should consider using more diversified methods, such as experimental studies, genetic analysis, etc., to improve precision and generalizability. Furthermore, it will be worthwhile to delve deeper into the

underlying mechanism by which parenting style influences neuroticism, considering the influence of cultural and social background on parenting practice and its effect, and how to optimize parenting strategies to promote individual mental health will be worthy of further discussion.

4 THE IMPACT OF ATTACHMENT STYLE ON NEUROTICISM LEVEL

4.1 Empirical Studies Overview

In the field of research on the effect of attachment style on neuroticism, several articles have provided valuable data and analysis in recent years.

First, in a 2009 study that looked at 274 Chinese college students, Pu sought to reveal the link between attachment, neurotic personality traits, and the perception of social support (Pu, 2009). A series of self-rating scales were used to evaluate the psychological state of the participants. These scales cover mood states, anxiety levels, social support, attachment styles, and neurotic tendencies in personality traits. In terms of attachment style, the study adopts a three-dimensional model, which covers three dimensions: secure attachment, avoidant attachment, and anxious attachment. Through the data collection of these scales, the study conducted a detailed analysis of the relevant variables. The result showed that insecure attachment was positively correlated with neurotic personality, with social support functioning as a mediator in this relationship. The authors attempt to provide a psychopathological explanation for the findings, pointing out that neuroticism is the biogenetic basis for anxiety, while early interaction experiences influence adult attachment. Attachment theory suggests that individuals' early interactions with their parents influence the formation of internal working models, which subsequently impact their interpersonal interactions and emotional regulation (Bowlby, 1977). Neuroticism, as a factor closely related to biological mechanisms, may affect an individual's interactions with their parents, and thus their attachment patterns, beginning in infancy. These two factors work together on an individual's mental health, making them more prone to anxiety.

Subsequently, Crawford, Shaver, & Goldsmith conducted a study involving 287 college students with a highly racially diverse sample (Crawford et al., 2007). This multicultural sample enabled a detailed

investigation into the attachment-neuroticism link across different cultural settings. The present research employed a cross-sectional design to gather data from questionnaires. In terms of data analysis, multiple regression analysis was applied to examine the relationship between anxious attachment and neuroticism, as well as to explore the moderating factors of conscientiousness and avoidant attachment. The study results indicated that the relationship between anxious attachment and neuroticism was not simply linear, conscientiousness and avoidant attachment showed their moderating effects on this relationship. Specifically, high conscientiousness weakened the association between neuroticism and anxious attachment, while low conscientiousness strengthened it. Additionally, the effects of avoidant attachment on anxious attachment differed at different neurotic levels: at high neurotic levels, avoidant attachment could reduce anxious attachment; at low neuroticism levels, avoidance of attachment actually increased anxious attachment. The study highlights the importance of emotional regulation in understanding the relationship between attachment and personality, with neuroticism having less impact on anxious attachment when people are better able to control their emotions. People with anxious attachment may have elevated levels of anxiety as a result of their inability to regulate their emotions effectively, while people with stronger emotional regulation are better able to control anxious attachment regardless of their neurotic level. Although the study considered multiple moderating factors, its cross-sectional design still could not determine causation, and the sample, while diverse, was largely concentrated in the United States and may not be fully representative of attachment and neurotic relationships in other cultural contexts around the globe.

Next, Crawford, Livesley, Jang, Shaver, Cohen, & Ganiban studied 239 pairs of twins from the Vancouver area of Canada (Crawford et al., 2007). The advantage of twin studies is that they can better understand the relationship between attachment and personality disorders by isolating genetic and environmental factors. Factor analysis and twin model analysis were used to investigate the relationship between anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, 11 personality disorder dimensions (emotional dysregulation), and 4 personality disorder dimensions (inhibitiveness). The researchers also used the Attachment Style Inventory (ECR) and the Personality Disorders Questionnaire (PDQ-IV). The results showed that anxious attachment was associated with 11 personality disorder dimensions

(emotional dysregulation), while avoidant attachment was associated with 4 personality disorder dimensions (inhibition). This suggests a strong link between anxious attachment and mood dysregulation, while avoidance attachment is associated with inhibitory behaviour. Mood disorders are a broadly defined dimension of personality disorders closely related to neuroticism (Jang & Livesley, 1999, Schroeder et al., 2002). Therefore, this study further supports the relationship between attachment and neuroticism. Although twin studies were able to separate genetic and environmental factors, the sample size was relatively small and limited to a specific geographic area, potentially limiting the generality of the findings. In addition, the study focused on the personality disorder dimension rather than directly measuring neuroticism, so caution is needed in interpreting the relationship between attachment and neuroticism.

Finally, Yu and Li investigated 160 college students, with the samples encompassing students of diverse genders and majors, concentrating on the relationship between adult attachment behaviors and personality traits of Chinese college students (Yu & Li, 2015). The study was carried out using the Adult Intimate Relationship Questionnaire (ECR) and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ). To explore the relationship between attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and personality traits, the Pearson correlation analysis was used for data analysis. The results clearly show that attachment insecurity, both anxiety and avoidance, were correlated with low levels of extraversion, whereas neuroticism and psychoticism personality traits were positively associated with attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. This implies that individuals with insecure attachment (high scores of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) are more prone to exhibit high neuroticism and psychopathic traits, while individuals with low attachment anxiety and avoidance are more likely to display high extroverted traits.

4.2 Summary of Findings

Taken collectively, the four studies probed into the relationship between attachment and neuroticism. Despite the samples being derived from different countries and regions, all studies discovered a significant positive correlation between attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and neuroticism. Nevertheless, Crawford et al. argued the importance of emotion regulation techniques in the connection between attachment and neuroticism is further

enhanced. The link between attachment and neuroticism is widely accepted, and insecure attachment, particularly attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, largely correlates with the experience of high levels of neuroticism. Thus, it can be inferred that the default attachment patterns that were built during the early childhood years strongly determine the emotional integration and mental stability of the individual throughout their life. Future research should address the causality between attachment and neuroticism, with belief to work in the mechanism of emotion-regulation strategies. Additionally, cross-cultural research and longitudinal design will contribute to a more comprehensive comprehension of this complex relationship. Future research could consider longitudinal designs to explore how attachment affects neuroticism levels over time by tracking the development of individuals from childhood to adulthood; cross-cultural comparisons should be made and similar studies replicated in different cultural contexts to test the universality of the relationship between attachment and neuroticism; experimental intervention studies should be designed to explore whether improving attachment quality can effectively reduce neuroticism levels, especially in high-risk populations; self-reports, observational methods, and physiological measures (e.g., heart rate variability, cortisol levels, etc.) should be combined to obtain more comprehensive data. The effect of attachment on neuroticism is a complex and multi-dimensional issue, involving multiple levels of biology, psychology, and socioculture. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing studies, a deeper understanding of the relationship between attachment and neuroticism can be gained and a theoretical basis can be provided for future interventions and treatments. Future research should continue to explore the unknown areas of this field, with a view to providing more scientific support for promoting the mental health of individuals.

5 DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

Consistent research indicates that there is a close connection between parenting styles and neuroticism. Authoritative parenting, characterized by high responsiveness and high demandingness, has been found to be associated with lower levels of neuroticism and concurrently promotes the development of self-esteem, autonomy, and

emotional regulation skills. In contrast, authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles, respectively marked by low responsiveness and high demandingness, as well as low responsiveness and low demandingness, are correlated with higher levels of neuroticism and can result in feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem, and poor emotional regulation capabilities, thereby elevating neuroticism levels.

Attachment types also play a vital role in the development of neuroticism. Secure attachment, characterized by trust and comfort in close relationships, is associated with lower degrees of neuroticism. Individuals with this type of attachment are capable of exploring the world with confidence and effectively coping with stress. Conversely, insecure attachment types, including anxious and avoidant attachments, are associated with higher levels of neuroticism. These attachment types are characterized by a lack of trust and comfort in relationships, leading to anxiety, insecurity, and difficulties in emotional regulation.

It is worth mentioning that warm, supportive, and responsive parents can cultivate secure attachment, which, in turn, contributes to better emotional regulation and a reduction in neuroticism. Therefore, parents should set clear expectations for their children while providing emotional support during the upbringing process, avoiding overprotection and fostering independence. Additionally, parents should consciously teach children effective emotional regulation skills, such as recognizing, expressing, and managing their own emotions, as well as how to use effective strategies to cope with emotional problems. Parents should consistently respond to their children's needs and provide assistance, establishing a safe and intimate relationship with their children and creating a reliable environment for their growth, where children feel loved and respected, promoting the development of healthy personality traits and reducing the risk of anxiety disorders and other mental health problems.

6 CONCLUSION

This article examines an interrelated model of parenting styles, attachment styles, and neuroticism levels, pointing out the fact that children's early life experiences significantly become the basis for later personality formation and mental health. More precisely, authoritative parenting styles and securely attached relationships are deemed to be the referent pillars both to lower neuroticism and to develop self-regulation, self-esteem, and mental resilience. Thus,

on the contrary, authoritarian, neglectful parenting styles, and insecure attachment relationships attest to the higher degree of neuroticism and show a direct connection with anxiety, mood disorders, and other mental illnesses.

The research outcomes provide pertinent notions in the field of practice and future studies. Interventions targeting parenting styles and attachment styles can effectively reduce neuroticism levels and enhance mental health. These interventions may include the improvement of regulation of emotions, the development of constructive communication, and the establishment of a secure relationship.

All in all, clarifying the decisive role that parenting styles and attachment styles play in an individual's neuroticism level can assist parents and educators in creating a superior nurturing environment for children and also enable adults to comprehend the shaping process of their own personality, thereby facilitating better self-acceptance, timely awareness of their mental state and making adjustments, to embrace a healthier self in the future.

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