Parenting Styles and Optimal Internet Use among Children with and without Learning Disabilities and ADHD (Short Paper)

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סגנונות הורות ושימוש מיטבי באינטרנט בקרב ילדים עם וללא לקויות למידה והפרעת קשב (מאמר קצר)

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Abstract

The current study examined which of the three permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting styles is associate with optimal Internet use among children with and without specific learning disorder (SLD) and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The study comprised of 300 participants; 150 children and their parents, aged 9-12 (M= 10.64), that were divided into two research groups: 71 children with SLD/ADHD and their parents, and 79 children with typical development (TD) and their parents. To ensure optimal data, each child was matched with their parent. A comparison between the two study's groups revealed that the SLD/ADHD group scored higher in the authoritarian style. Also, both parents and children reported on authoritative parenting style. Furthermore, the authoritative parenting style was found to be the optimal one of the three, associated with less cyberbullying. An examination of the frequency, use, and exposure of children to cyberbullying, indicated that an authoritative parenting style had a positive effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and their children, resulting in lower exposure to cyberbullying. This relation was found to be significantly higher among the SLD/ADHD group.

Keywords: Parenting Style, Cyberbullying, Learning Disabilities, ADHD.

Introduction

In recent years, the use of the Internet for personal communication, specifically among children and adolescents, has increased significantly (Kwan. et al., 2020). Despite the positive impact of Internet usage, it has also enabled new forms of violence, such as cyberbullying. More and more children and adolescents are being exposed to cyberbullying (Olenik-Shemesh, et al., 2017).

The study focuses on children with specific learning disability (SLD) and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), since they exhibit difficulties in social and academic functioning as well as a tendency to an impulsive, aggressive, and anti-social behavior (Shaoo et al., 2015; Tarawneh, 2017). To the best of our knowledge, the current study will be the first to examine the association between parenting styles and optimal Internet use among children with SLD/ADHD compared to children with typical development (TD).

Cyberbullying

Nowadays, alongside the progress of mobile technologies, children and adolescents have become more exposed to cyberbullying (Kwan et al., 2020). Cyberbullying is commonly defined as bullying using any technology, including mobile phones as well as Internet communication technologies (ICT) (Canty et al., 2016). It has a significantly negative impact on both victims and perpetrators, potentially resulting in various internalized and externalized problems, suicidal ideation, and mental health issues (Alonso & Romero, 2020; Quintana-Orts et al., 2020). Several studies have documented the prevalence of cyberbullying, and found that between 3% to 72% of adolescents reported of being victimized (Selkie et al., 2016), 19% of college students reported of being targeted by cyberbullying on social networking, and 46% of them was bystanders to cyberbullying (Gahagan, et al., 2016). Those findings are quite worrisome in light of the existing connection between cyberbullying and a variety of negative phenomenon's, such as neuroticism and depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, fear, nervousness, irritability, sleep disorders, and concentration difficulties (Gaffney, et al., 2019).

The above have emphasized that children who lack the required e-literacies are more vulnerable to online risks. In addition, hypersensitivity, social innocence, tendency to obsessive behavior, which is typical to children with SLD and ADHD, are more vulnerable to online risks (Archer, 2015; Barringer-Brown, 2015; Olenik-Shemesh, et al., 2012).

Cyberbullying among Children with SLD/ADHD

Children with SLD experience difficulties such as slow or inaccurate reading of words, difficulty in reading comprehension, spelling mistakes, difficulties in written self-expression, difficulty in mastering mathematical logic, mathematical facts or calculations, and mathematical logic. The prevalence of SLD among school-aged children ranged between 5% and 15%, with more males than females in a ratio of 2:1 (APA, 2013). Another developmental neurological disorder that is most commonly associated with SLD is ADHD. The disorder is characterized by persistent behavior that includes mental migration, lack of perseverance, difficulty maintaining focus, and difficulty in organization (APA, 2013). The severity of the disorder is also related to a decline in value in social and academic functioning, aggressive behavior, delinquency, antisocial behaviors and substance abuse (Patel & Barzman, 2013). ADHD is considered a common occurrence, estimated to impact 5%-10% of the total population of school-age children (Ministry of Health Israel, 2021). Children with SLD and ADHD often experience difficulties with socialization, especially in the number of friends they make (Tarawneh, 2017). Another common issue they face is social-emotional and behavioral problems (Francis, et al., 2018).

Cyberbullying is known to be more common among individuals with disabilities (Saylor & Leach, 2009). Barringer-Brown's (2015) investigated the impact of cyberbullying on seriously emotional disabled and SLD youth (separately) between the ages of 12 and 19, compared to their TD peers. The main result indicated that cyberbullying is a bigger problem among children with

SLD, when compared to TD children. This finding also applies to children with ADHD, as can be seen in the study of Haiman and her colleagues (2015).

Parenting Styles and Internet Use

In light of the new technological advancements in various forms of media, parents encounter difficulties in their ability to monitor the content and the people to whom their children are exposed (Symons, et al., 2017). Various components of parenting relate or affect children's use of the Internet. Baumrind (1971) first classified parenting styles into three types, which evolved in literature throughout the years (e.g. Hutchison, et al., 2016; Ihmeideh & Shawareb, 2014): *(1) Permissive parenting* – perceived as accepting all of their children's demands, and allowing for disproportionate autonomy. They set very few boundaries to their children, and they will support their child blindly. *(2) Authoritarian parenting* – high demands from their children, a rigid set of laws, use punishment to control their children, and almost no support and warmth. *(2) Authoritative parenting* – clear boundaries alongside nurturing and listening, a clear set of rules, and expectations, while explaining the rationale behind any decision. In addition to these three styles, Maccoby & Martin (1983) defined the "*neglectful parenting style*", where parents are described as indifferent, detached and non-promoting.

Teymouri (2019) investigated stress and parenting styles among parents of TD and ADHD children. It was found that parents of children with ADHD often adopt a more permissive and authoritarian parenting style. Similar findings were found for children with SLD by Rupesh and colleagues (2020); The authoritative style was found to be "active" and "supportive", while the permissive and authoritarian styles were found to be significantly associated with a less "active" and "supportive" style and more "avoidant" style.

Several previous studies have examined the relation between parenting styles and cyberbullying. For example, children of authoritative parents are less likely to fail online, in contrast to the authoritarian parenting style (Moreno–Ruiz et al., 2019).

Another factor related to parenting styles, which may associate with cyberbullying, is the parent-child relationship. A study on middle and high school students between the ages of 13 and 18, found that a positive parent-child interaction helps the child's healthy self-perception, leading to fewer Internet addiction problems, and vice versa (Huang, et al., 2019).

While previous studies have examined relationship between parenting styles and children's online activity, especially concerning negative behaviors such as cyberbullying (e.g. Broll & Reynolds, 2020; Nielsen, et al., 2020), the special needs population was not examined with regard to each of the variables separately. The current study aims to examine the effects of parenting styles on younger children exposed to the Internet, as well as the association of parenting styles on TD children. It should be emphasized that to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to examine parenting styles among young aged TD population.

Methodology

Sample

The study comprised of 300 participants; 150 children with and without SLD/ADHD and their parents. The children's sample included 90 boys and 60 girls aged between 9 and 12 ($M = 10.64$, $SD = 1.10$). 71 children were diagnosed with SLD/ADHD and 79 were TD.

Table 1.   Parents and children's demographic characteristics and ICT background by study group

Variables	Values	All sample (N = 150)	TD (n = 79)	SLD/ADHD (n = 71)	χ^2	p
Parents' demographic characteristics						
Gender	Male	18 (12.0%)	8 (10.1%)	10 (14.1%)		
(Parents)	Female	132 (88.0%)	71 (89.9%)	61 (85.9%)	.55	.456
Education level[1]	High School	38 (25.3%)	16 (20.3%)	22 (31.0%)		
	Bachelor's degree	82 (54.7%)	46 (58.2%)	36 (50.7%)		
	Master's or PhD degree	30 (20.0%)	17 (21.5%)	13 (18.3%)	2496.50	.198
Children's demographic characteristics						
Gender	Boys	90 (60.0%)	39 (49.4%)	51 (71.8%)		
	Girls	60 (40.0%)	40 (50.6%)	20 (28.2%)	7.86**	.005
Grade[1]	4th grade	56 (37.3%)	28 (35.4%)	28 (39.4%)		
	5th grade	41 (27.3%)	18 (22.8%)	23 (32.4%)		
	6th grade	53 (35.3%)	33 (41.8%)	20 (28.2%)	2493.00	.212
Class type	Mainstream class	126 (84.0%)	79 (100.0%)	47 (66.2%)		
	Special education class	12 (8.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (16.9%)		
	Special education school	12 (8.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (16.9%)	31.79***	.001
Children's ICT background characteristics						
Cell phone	No	25 (16.7%)	14 (17.7%)	11 (15.5%)		
	Yes	125 (83.3%)	65 (82.3%)	60 (84.5%)	.13	.715
Computer/ tablet / iPad	No	14 (9.3%)	10 (12.7%)	4 (5.6%)		
	Yes, at home	72 (48.0%)	37 (46.8%)	35 (49.3%)		
	Yes, personal	64 (42.7%)	32 (40.5%)	32 (45.1%)	2.21	.332
ICT knowledge	Skilled, needs help	17 (11.3%)	6 (7.6%)	11 (15.5%)		
	Skilled	133 (88.7%)	73 (92.4%)	60 (84.5%)	2.32	.128
Filtering software	Does not know	29 (19.3%)	16 (20.3%)	13 (18.3%)		
	No	57 (38.0%)	32 (40.5%)	25 (35.2%)		
	Yes	64 (42.7%)	31 (39.2%)	33 (46.5%)	.81	.668

Study Tools

The study included five questionnaires for the children, and two questionnaires for the parents:

1. Demographic questionnaire (for both): The children' questionnaire included 7 questions, and the parents' questionnaire included 13 questions.
2. ICT frequency and skills questionnaire (for children only):
    2.1. ICT frequency of use – Examines student's network usage frequency using a 6-degree Likert scale. The internal consistency of α Cronbach's was .92.
    2.2. ICT skills – Examines student's social network skills using a 5-degree Likert scale. The questionnaire is part of the online survey of children in the EU (Livingstone et al., 2011) and has been adapted to the present study. The internal consistency of α Cronbach's was .93.
3. Cyberbullying Questionnaire (Victim, Perpetrator, bystanders) (Smith et al., 2008, translated and edited by Heiman et al., 2014) – (for children only) The questions included items on

network usage, web browsing frequency, computer control skills assessment, and student engagement as victims, as abusers and as bystanders to cyberbullying. The internal consistency of α Cronbach's was .84.

4. Relationship Qualities Version (NRI RQV; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) (for children) – The measurement is done by self-reporting about the relationships of the child with his parents, through 5 sub-scales, which optimally represents the quality of relationships: companionship, intimate disclosure, emotional support, approval, and satisfaction. 5 sub-scales also represent negative characteristics in the relationships: conflict, criticism, pressure, exclusion, and dominance. The 9 items are summed up into a single measure that represents the quality of the relationship. The internal consistency of α Cronbach was .93.

5. Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) (for both) – Contains 30 items and is used to classify parents according to one of the three parenting styles by Baumrind (1971): authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. An adaptation was made to this questionnaire for the children. The response was scaled using a 5-degree Likert scale. The internal consistency of α Cronbach was .83 (authoritarian), .82 (authoritative), and .63 (permissive).

Results

In order to examine the differences between TD and SLD/ADHD children regarding the parenting style, a three-way (2x2x3) mixed ANOVA analysis was conducted. Results are shown in Figure 1.
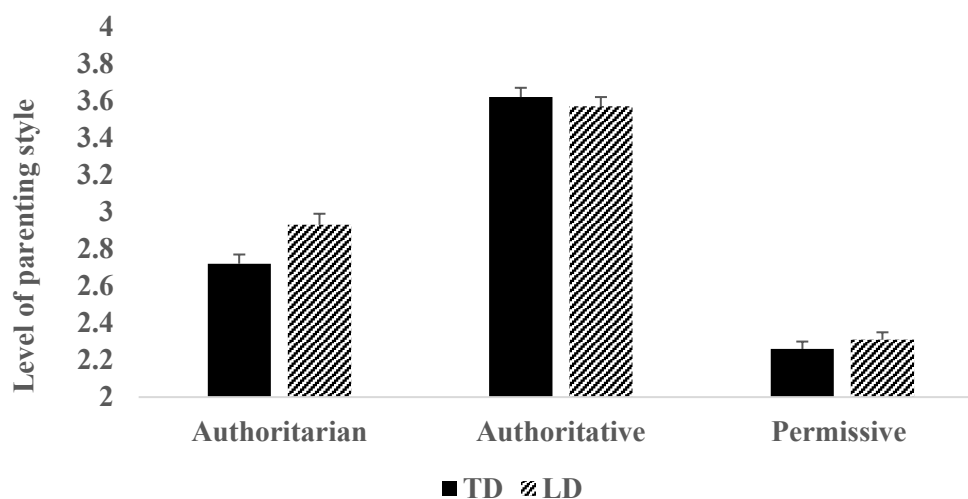
Figure 1.   Mean (and S.E) of parenting style by study group and style

As seen in Figure 1, a significant main effect for the parenting style was found. Authoritative parenting was the highest of the three parenting styles in both study groups. A comparison between the two study groups in each parenting style revealed that the SLD/ADHD group scored higher on the authoritarian style compared to the TD group.

In order to compare between the two respondents in each parenting style, a t-tests was conducted.

Table 2.   Mean (and SD) of parenting styles' level by study group, respondent, and style

		TD (*n* = 79)		SLD/ADHD (*n* = 71)	
Parenting style	Respondent	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Authoritarian style	Parents	2.59	0.60	2.96	0.73
	Children	2.85	0.65	2.91	0.71
Authoritative style	Parents	3.78	0.55	3.70	0.51
	Children	3.46	0.63	3.45	0.62
Permissive style	Parents	2.11	0.47	2.16	0.55
	Children	2.42	0.51	2.46	0.44

As can be seen in Table 2, positive correlations were found between the authoritative parenting style (as perceived by the children) and the quality of the parent-child relationship. That is, as the level of authoritative style increases, the quality of the parent-child relationship increases, respectively. This correlation was significantly higher among the SLD/ADHD group. Furthermore, as the level of authoritarian parenting style increases, the quality of the parent-child relationship decreases.

In order to examine the differences between TD and SLD/ADHD children in the ICT frequency and skills, and exposure to cyberbullying, one-way ANOVA analyses were conducted. In terms of frequency and use of ICT, exposure to cyberbullying, frequency, use and exposure to cyberbullying (as a victim, perpetrator, or bystanders) were at low levels in both groups.

In order to examine the correlations between parenting styles and parent-child relationship, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted for each study group. In addition, in order to compare between the two study groups in the correlation coefficients, Fisher r-to-z transformation analyses were conducted.

Table 3.   Pearson correlation coefficients between parenting styles and parent-child relationship by study groups

	Authoritarian style				Authoritative style				Permissive style			
	TD (*n* = 79)	SLD/ADHD (*n* = 71)	Fisher	*p*	TD (*n* = 79)	SLD/ADHD (*n* = 71)	Fisher	*p*	TD (*n* = 79)	SLD/ADHD (*n* =71)	Fisher	*p*
Parent-child relationship	-.17	-.28*	0.70	0.48	.32**	.61***	2.26*	.024	-.07	-.01	0.36	.719

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

As can be seen in Table 3, as the level of quality of the parent-child relationship increases, the level of exposure to cyberbullying decreases.

In order to examine the correlations between parenting styles, parent-child relationship, and the child's exposure to cyberbullying, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted for each study group.

Table 4. Pearson correlation coefficients between parenting styles, parent-child relationship and exposure to cyberbullying for each study group.

	Parent-child relationship		Authoritarian style		Authoritative style		Permissive style	
	TD	SLD/ ADHD	TD	SLD/ ADHD	TD	SLD/ ADHD	TD	SLD/ ADHD
	($n = 79$)	($n = 71$)	($n = 79$)	($n = 71$)	($n = 79$)	($n = 71$)	($n = 79$)	($n = 71$)
Cyberbullying								
Victim	-.47***	-.49***	-.09	.04	-.26*	-.54***	.23*	.06
Perpetrator	-.45***	-.44***	.05	.05	-.20	-.40***	.22*	.12
Bystanders	-.48***	-.49***	.02	.13	-.09	-.37***	.35**	.17

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

Table 4 indicates significant negative correlations in both study groups between parent-child relationship and the child's level of exposure to cyberbullying. Negative correlation coefficients were also found between the authoritative style, and the child's level of exposure to cyberbullying among the children with SLD/ADHD. A significant negative correlation was found between the authoritative style and the child's degree of exposure to cyberbullying as a victim among TD children. The negative correlation coefficient between the authoritative style and the child's degree of exposure to cyberbullying as a victim was significantly higher among children with SLD/ADHD compared to TD children. Finally, a significant positive correlation between the level of permissive style and the child's degree of exposure to cyberbullying as a victim, perpetrator or bystanders, was found.

Discussion

The results indicated that while the authoritative parenting style was found to be the most common of the three styles in both study groups, the authoritarian style was more common among the SLD/ADHD compared to the TD group. Previous studies found that the authoritative parenting style is the style that is most supportive and involved in TD children's online life (Yusuf et al., 2020), compared to authoritarian parenting style, which was found in higher ranks among the SLD/ADHD group (Hutchison, et al., 2016; Teymouri, 2019).

Moreover, the current study found positive correlations between the authoritative parenting style (as perceived by the children) and the quality of the parent-child relationship, primarily among the SLD/ADHD group. The findings further indicated that the level of authoritarian parenting style affects the quality of the parent-child relationship to the worse, and vice versa. This finding highlights the differences between the two study groups, and emphasizes the degree in which children with SLD/ADHD require their parents' support.

In light of the above, it can be cautiously assessed that parents seeking a good relationship with their children should adopt a more authoritative and less permissive approach. The authoritative approach was found to have a positive link to the quality of the parent-child relationship by both children and parents who adopt it. Moreover, the child's level of exposure to cyberbullying as a victim tended to be lower among children whose parents perceived their relationship as more positive.

Interestingly, no significant differences were found between TD children and children with SLD/ADHD with regard to exposure to cyberbullying. Although, as indicated above, previous studies found adolescents with SLD/ADHD to be more prone to cyberbullying (e.g. Barringer-Brown's, 2015; Haiman, et al., 2018). This can be explained by the findings of the current study indicating that the quality of the parent-child relationship reduces exposure to cyberbullying, which is also supported by the findings of previous studies (Huang, et al., 2019; Triantoro & Hadi, 2020). Accordingly, children who reported a higher quality of parent-child relationship also reported a lower degree of exposure to cyberbullying. Another explanation can be that the positive correlation between the parent-child relationship and the authoritative parenting style among the SLD/ADHD group was stronger among the SLD/ADHD group compared to the TD group.

The findings showed that the degree of exposure to cyberbullying is significantly lower among young participants, could provide a further explanation for similar results in exposure to cyberbullying among both groups. It is important to note, that the current study focused on examining the above issues in young children. Also, as no reference was found in existing literature to the effects of parenting styles on TD children, the current study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between parenting styles and optimal Internet use among young children with and without SLD/ADHD.

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