

ABSTRACT

A Comparative Study of Psychiatric Morbidity,
Marital Discord and Disciplinary Techniques
in Mothers of Children with Emotional
and Behavioural Problems referred to a
Child Guidance Clinic and
Mothers of "Normal" Children attending
a Walk-In Paediatric Clinic

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This research project compares psychiatric morbidity, marital discord and disciplinary techniques in mothers of children with emotional and behavioural problems and mothers of "normal" children. For the purposes of this study, "normal" children were defined as those children with no emotional and behavioural problems.

The sample consisted of mothers of 30 boys and 30 girls, between the ages of 5 and 12 years, who had been referred to a Child Guidance Clinic for emotional and behavioural problems. These mothers served as the "clinic" group and in this study are referred to as clinic mothers. Mothers of 30 boys and 30 girls attending a Walk-In Paediatric Clinic served as the "control" group and in the study are referred to as control mothers. The children were matched according to age and sex. Measures of maternal

psychiatric morbidity, marital discord and children's behavioural problems were obtained from the mothers by means of well established questionnaires. The 30 Question General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-30) measured the probability of maternal psychiatric morbidity, the Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State (GRIMS) assessed the quality of the marital relationship and the Revised Behaviour Problem Checklist (RBPC) assessed the behaviour problem in the child. Mothers were interviewed as to disciplinary techniques used. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were done when appropriate.

From the data collected, it was found that 96.7% of clinic mothers had a probable psychiatric condition. The study further found that clinic mothers showed more marital discord than control mothers and tended to use physical punishment to discipline boys, whereas they were inconsistent in their discipline of girls. Control mothers were more likely to use persuasion with discussion to discipline both boys and girls. Marital discord was found to be associated with undercontrolled behaviour in boys and overcontrolled behaviour in girls.

Based on the findings of the study, multiple assessment procedures for the referred child and his family and education in child rearing practices for parents were recommended.

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