

“Be careful, it’s dangerous out there”: The role of parental danger beliefs, anxiety and mindfulness in overprotective parenting

SAFE SORRY

Introduction

Parents’ beliefs about the world as a dangerous and threatening place (Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018; Furedi, 2008)

- may elicit **overprotective parenting**
- Role of parental **anxiety** and **mindfulness**
- Role of **other parent’s** beliefs, anxiety and mindfulness

PARENT DANGER BELIEFS

→ The social world perceived as a **dangerous place** where good, decent people’s values and way of life are threatened by bad people (Perry, Sibley & Duckitt, 2012)

- may make parents more or less sensitive

to **cues** about **danger and threat**.

OVERPROTECTIVE PARENTING

Level of protection that is excessive considering the development of the child (Thomasgard et al., 1995)

- immediately seeing danger whenever the child wants to do something new (**anxious rearing**)
- taking tasks out of the hands of children without giving them the opportunity to try themselves (**premature problem-solving**)
- treating children like little ones (**infantilisation**)
- reading messages on the child’s phone (**privacy invasion**)



PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS FOR OVERPROTECTION

→ **Within parental characteristics**

PARENTAL ANXIETY

→ may elicit **inappropriate** level of directiveness, involvement or monitoring (Segrin et al., 2013)

PARENTAL MINDFULNESS

→ trait of awareness and attention to **inner experience**, non-reactivity and non-judgement about such experience (Burke et al., 2019)

→ Reduces **stress** and increases efficacy (Patterson, 2002)

→ **Child characteristics**

PERCEIVED CHILD ANXIETY

→ parents of anxious children or with an inhibited temperament or shy more likely to be **overprotective** (Coplan et al., 2009)

→ Child’s anxiety correlated to **parent’s anxiety** (Segrin, 2013)

RESEARCH GOALS

- Danger beliefs → overprotective parenting
- Moderating role of parental anxiety and mindfulness
- Partner effects → APIM models for mothers and fathers

→ E.g., «There are many dangerous people in our society who will attack someone out of pure meanness, for no reason at all.»

PROTECTIVE AND RISK VARIABLES

Parental anxiety (Marteau & Bekker, 1992 – STAI short version, Spielberger, 1983)

- state anxiety subscale
- 6 items, $\alpha = .81-80$ (M-F)
- E.g., «I feel worried»

Mindfulness (Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; Brown & Ryan, 2003)

- Present-moment awareness and attention in daily life
- 15 items, $\alpha = .86-87$ (M-F)
- E.g., «I rush through activities without being really attentive to them»

CONTROLLING VARIABLE

Perceived Child anxiety (Marteau & Bekker, 1992 – STAI short version, Spielberger, 1983)

- parental perception of anxiety symptoms among children
- 6 items, $\alpha = .$
- E.g., «My child is calm » (reverse)

ANALYSIS STRATEGY

- R version 4.1.2
- repeated measures MANOVA
- regression analyses
- Actor Partner Interaction Model APIM with Structural Equation Modelling

Results

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables for the mothers and fathers samples separately

	Mean Mothers	SD Mothers	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	Mean Fathers	SD Fathers
1. Overprotective parenting	2.22	.51	-	.41**	.32**	-.29**	.19*	2.11	.47
2. Danger beliefs	3.12	.62	.40**	-	.14	-.19*	-.02	3.09	.62
3. Parental anxiety	2.49	.67	.17*	.24**	-	-.36**	.41**	2.16	.60
4. Mindfulness	3.62	.59	-.23**	-.16**	-.28**	-	-.26**	3.79	.58
5. Perceived child anxiety	2.41	.71	.25**	.21**	.33**	-.14	-	2.21	.57

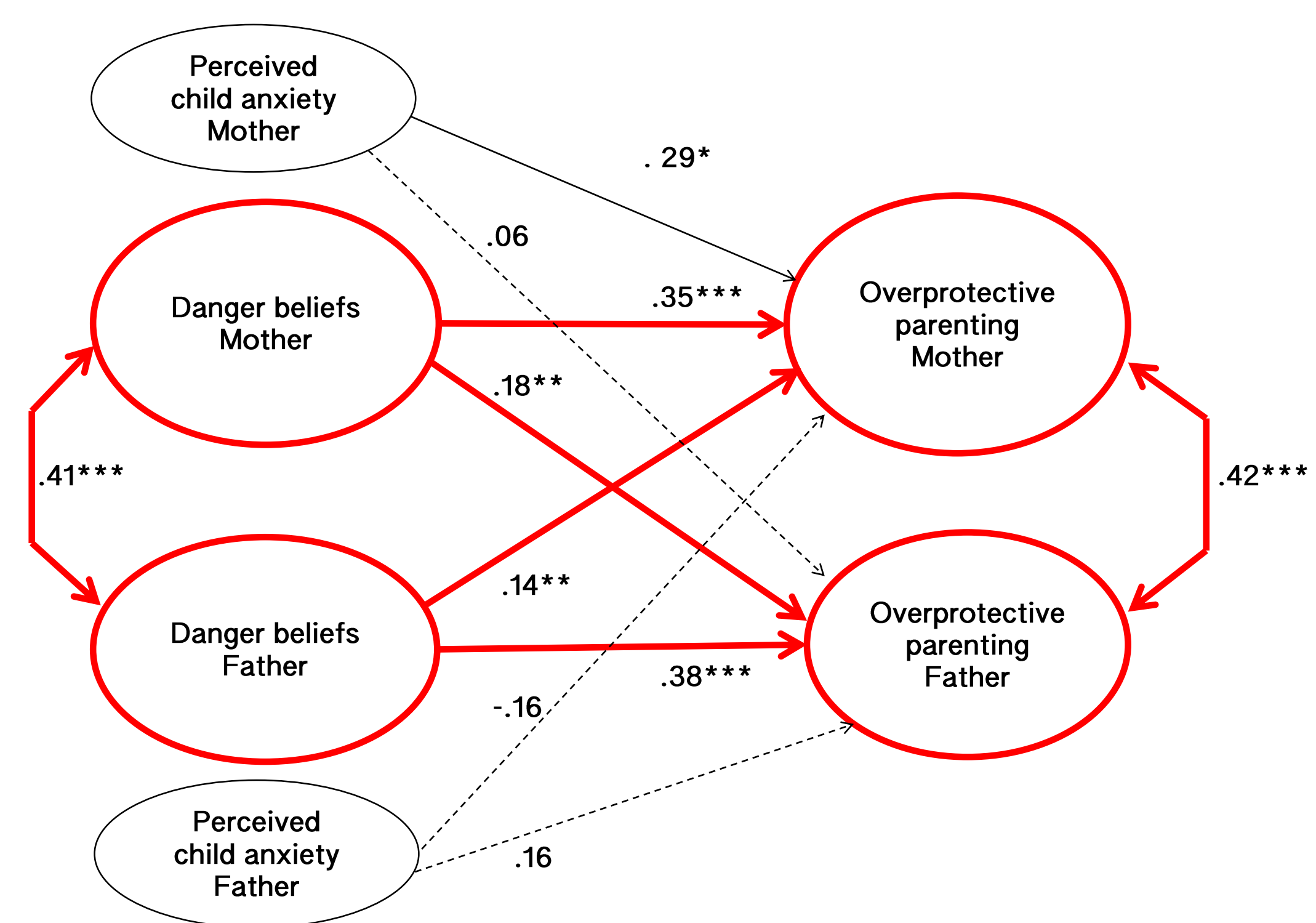
Note. Associations for mothers are displayed below the diagonal, associations for fathers above the diagonal. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 2. Hierarchical regressions examining the role of parental anxiety and mindfulness in predicting overprotective parenting

	Parental anxiety		Parental mindfulness	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Perceived child anxiety	.11	.10	.12	.11
Danger beliefs	.38**	.37**	.35**	.36**
Moderator (anxiety / mindfulness)	.12*	.14*	.20**	.20**
Danger x moderator	-.10	.07	.04	.01

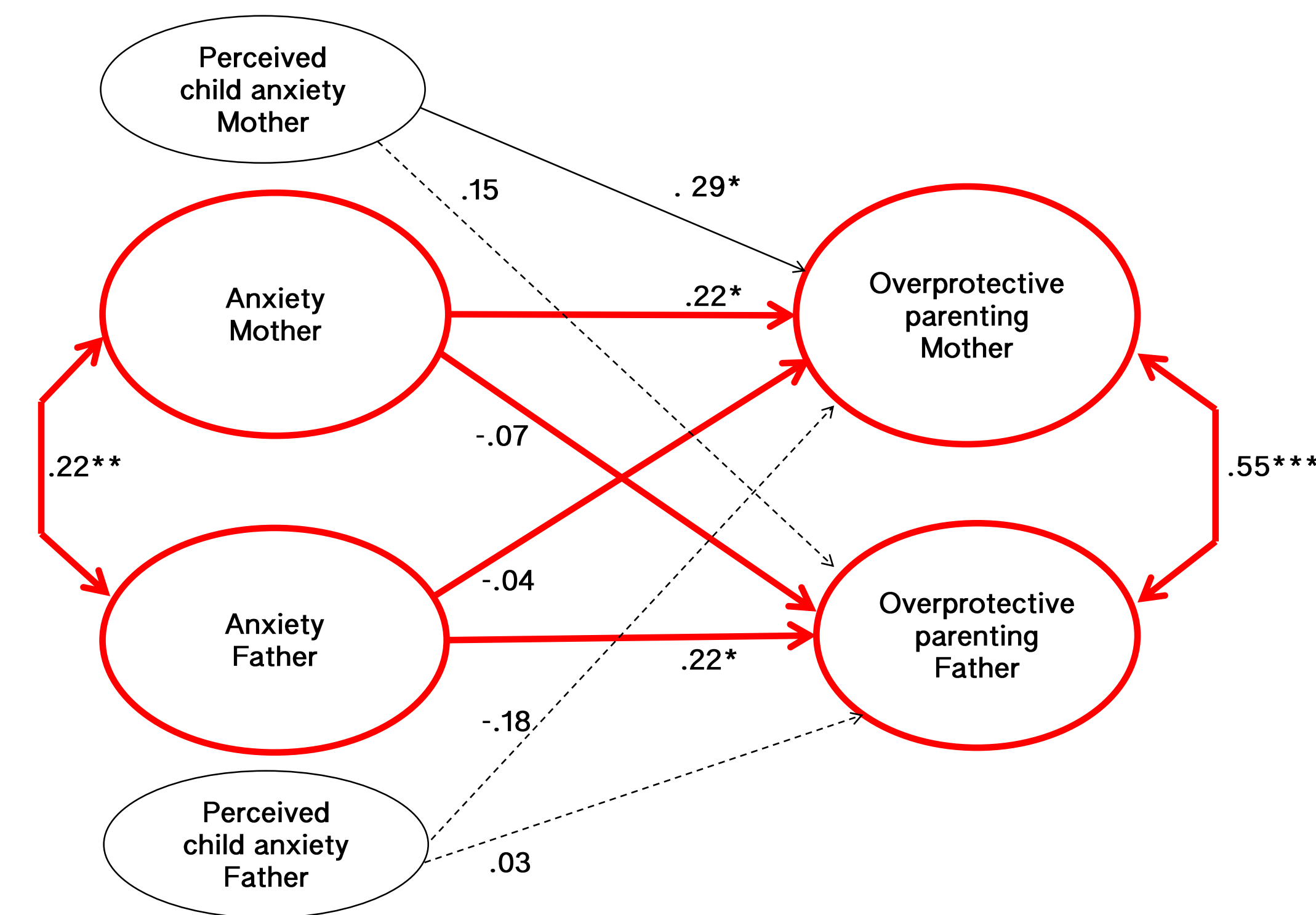
Note. Standardised coefficients are presented. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Figure 1. APIM model depicting the relation between parents’ danger beliefs and overprotective parenting



Note. Standardized coefficients are presented. For the sake of clarity, the correlations between perceived child anxiety and endogenous variables are not presented. *** $p < .000$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Figure 2. APIM model depicting the relation between parents’ anxiety and overprotective parenting



Note. Standardized coefficients are presented. For the sake of clarity, the correlations between perceived child anxiety and endogenous variables are not presented. *** $p < .000$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Method

SAMPLE

- 283 Swiss mothers and 184 fathers
- 147 parents who both participated
- Parents Mage = 47.28 yrs (SD=5.46)
- Heterogenous sample in terms of education and income
- Adolescents Mage = 14.69 yrs (SD=.69)

OVERPROTECTIVE PARENTING

Premature pb solving, anxious rearing, privacy invasion, infantilisation (MOPS; Chevrier et al. 2021)

- anxious overprotection subscale
- 25 items, $\alpha = 90 - 89$ (M-F)
- E.g., «I try to solve all of the pbs of my son/daughter without him/her having to do anything»

DANGER AND THREAT BELIEFS

Composite score

- Total 16 items, $\alpha = 89-87$ (M-F)
- based on 2 scales

World Out There (Gurland & Grolnick, 2005)

- 10 items
- E.g., «It makes me nervous to think about all the dangers kids are exposed to today.»

Social Worldview scale Refined (Perry et al., 2013) – dangerous worldviews subscale

- 6 items

Discussion

Danger beliefs relate to overprotective parenting

- Both maternal and paternal beliefs relate uniquely to overprotective parenting, thereby controlling for perceived child anxiety
- Value of **research on danger and threat beliefs** in parenting

Parental anxiety and mindfulness matter

- Anxious parents are more overprotective.
- Mindful parents are less overprotective.
- **No moderation** of overprotection by anxiety or mindfulness.

Mothers and fathers influence each other’s overprotective parenting

- Mothers’ and fathers’ **danger beliefs** associated with their **partner’s overprotection**
- When a mother believes that the world is dangerous and threatening, not only is she overprotective (actor effect) but the father also has a higher level of overprotection (partner effect).

- No partner effect of anxiety or mindfulness on their partner’s overprotection (only actor effect)