Attributions and Attitudes of Mothers and Fathers in Jordan

Suha Al-Hassan and
Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood, The Hashemite University, P.O. Box 150459, Zarqa 13115, Jordan.

Hanan Takash
The Hashemite University.

Suha Al-Hassan: suha-al@hu.edu.jo

SYNOPSIS

Objective—The present study examined mean level similarities and differences as well as correlations between mothers' and fathers' attributions regarding successes and failures in caregiving situations and progressive versus authoritarian attitudes in Jordan.

Design—Interviews were conducted with both mothers and fathers in 112 families.

Results—There were no significant main effects of gender on any of the constructs of interest. Mothers and fathers reported similar levels of attributions regarding uncontrollable success, adult-controlled failure, and child-controlled failure in the same family. Regarding attitudes, mothers and fathers reported greater progressive attitudes than authoritarian attitudes. Large, significant correlations were found for concordance between parents in the same family on all seven attributions and attitudes examined; all remained significant after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias. Significant positive correlations were found for mothers' and fathers' attributions regarding uncontrollable success, adult-controlled failure, child-controlled failure, perceived control over failure, progressive attitudes, authoritarian attitudes, and modernity of attitudes.

Conclusions—This study concluded that in Jordan mothers and fathers hold similar levels of attributions and attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Jordanian Culture

Jordan is considered one of the youngest countries in the Arab region, both in terms of its history and its populace – 42.2% of Jordanians are 14 or younger, and 31.4% fall between 15 and 29 years of age (Business Optimization Consultants, 2001). The total population is 5.8 million, with 40–45% having Bedouin or tribal origins and 50–55% Palestinian origin, with a small percentage (less than 5%) from different ethnic minorities (e.g., Armenian; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). Jordanians are predominantly Muslim (94%).

Economically, Jordan is a middle-income country; its GDP per capita (PPP USD$) in 2004 was USD$4,688 (United Nations Development Program, 2007). Since assuming the throne in 1999, King Abdullah II has undertaken some broad economic reforms in a long-term effort to improve living standards. Since the early 1920s, Jordan has forged a largely comprehensive educational system geared to develop the human resources of its citizens.

Correspondence concerning this manuscript may be addressed to Suha Al-Hassan, Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood, The Hashemite University, P.O. Box 150459, Zarqa 13115, Jordan. Phone: 962-777-477159. Fax: 962-3826613. suha-al@hu.edu.jo.

This notion of human resources is significant to the framework of the country – Jordan has very limited natural resources besides its people and thus has embarked on a serious and diligent mission to become a leader within the "knowledge economy." The National Education Strategy, drafted in 2006, is "the consequence of deliberations concerning the importance of human resources development for the future of Jordan in order to achieve integrated economic and social development and implement His Majesty King Abdullah II's directives" (Toukan, Alnoaimi, & Odibat, 2006, p. 5). With the Strategy, educational leaders hoped to "achieve its goals in orienting the programs and practices of teaching and learning to provide students with the skills required for success in the Knowledge Economy" (Toukan et al., 2006, p. 5). Such investment in and emphasis on education has thus far paid off well, as is demonstrated by Jordan's impressive improvements in its literacy rate, from 33% in 1960 to 85.4% in 1996 to 92.7% in 2007, which gives Jordan the highest ranking in the Arab world (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007).

Jordan is committed to ensuring that it is a safe, welcoming homeland fit for all children and that socioeconomic disparities are reduced by generous, supportive national policies that give a headstart to the underprivileged. Jordan focuses on early childhood care and education (ECCE), and efforts are made to provide learning environments that help children develop and grow, sustained by well-informed parents and suitably trained teachers in the context of home and school. ECCE efforts have revised the legislative framework in favor of children, reviewed and amended the Penal Law, the Juvenile Law, and the Personal Status Law, and enacted new laws that directly or indirectly support children's welfare. It has introduced frameworks for child focused planning, including the National Plan of Action for Children (2004 – 2013, launched in October 2004), the National Framework for Family Protection (including the setting up of the National Council for Family Affairs in 2001), the National Early Childhood Development Strategy, the National Strategy to Eliminate Child Labour (adopted in 2003), the National Youth Strategy (2005 – 2009, adopted in December 2004), the National Strategy for the Jordanian Family, and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy of 2002. These efforts support, sustain, and complete the Early Childhood Development Strategy launched in December 2000 and the subsequent Plan of Action for the years 2003 – 2007. Thus, these efforts are directed toward improving childrearing practices among mothers as well as fathers.

Over the past decade Jordan has made remarkable achievements in the areas of health, nutrition, and education and has attempted to overcome gender differences. Infant and child mortality rates (IMR and U5MR) for Jordan reflect improvements in meeting the survival rights of children. Low IMR and U5MR at 21 and 24 per 1,000, respectively, has motivated the government to focus more closely on development and protection issues.

Most Jordanians are Muslims. Islam recognizes family as the fundamental social unit. Along with the husband-wife relationship, the parent-child relationship is most important. To maintain any social relationship both parties must have some clear-cut rights as well as obligations. Relationships are reciprocal. Duties of one side are the rights of the other side. So in parent-child relationships, the rights of parents are the obligations (duties) of the children and vice versa; the rights of children are obligations (duties) of parents (Arshed, 2010). Islam is strongly sensitive to the crucial dependence of the child on the parents. Their decisive role in forming the child's personality is clearly recognized in Islam. In Islam, parents are duty bound to see that their child's development and growth are healthy in every aspect--physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. This may require parents to be strict at times and lenient at others. If the situation calls for parents to be strict to protect their children spiritually, then they must do so. This implies that childrearing practices in Jordan could be considered authoritarian at times and progressive at other times. Children of

traditional Jordanian families are not free to do what they like if not approved by their parents or families.

Parental Attributions and Attitudes within Jordan

Arabic culture was shaped by religion and traditions (Feliet & Al-Seyyed, 2003). The status of a child in a traditional Muslim family is dictated by the Quran and the Sunna (custom associated with the Prophet Muhammad). Children are to be protected and cherished, and they are also expected to return complete respect to their parents. This relationship is clearly defined for all Muslim families. Jordanian culture is considered part of Arabic and Islamic culture; thus, it has been shaped by religion and traditions as well. Historically, and from a broader cultural perspective with regard to Jordanian families, children were expected to show respect for authority, and it is accepted for parents to make decisions for their children and for children to accept adults' opinions. Children must learn that the interests of the family come first and must shape their actions with the family point of view in mind, much as in many other cultures (Kagitcibasi, 2002). Families in most societies are a system of interdependent relations, where family integrity requires cooperative interconnectedness.

Socialization and parenting issues became a subject of Arab research interest in the early 1960s (Ahmed, 2009). Subehi (1994) noted that, in general, Arab parents' attitudes about childrearing are more progressive than authoritarian. Sabri (2002) investigated the pattern of socialization of Jordanian families and found that, although some families were authoritarian in dealing with their children, most (88%) were tolerant and progressive. Abu Aita (2005) also found that Jordanian adolescents perceive their parents' attitudes and practices in bringing them up as more progressive than authoritarian.

Most of the prior research on parenting in Jordan has investigated parental attitudes and practices toward childrearing. A study conducted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development in Jordan to investigate parental attitudes reported a high correspondence and consistency between mothers' and fathers' childrearing attitudes and discipline styles (Nimer & Samara, 1990). In addition, when parents are more educated they tend to have more accepting, caring, and democratic attitudes towards childrearing (Al-Amir, 2004).

There is some evidence that Jordanian mothers value obedience and getting along with others in their children. Al-Hassan and De Baz (2010) investigated the values that mothers wish to instill in their children. Mothers' emphasized appropriate behavior (e.g., politeness, good habits, respecting elders, obedience, and loyalty to family), decency (e.g., honesty, charity, following social rules, and responsibility), and lovingness (e.g., respecting others, getting along with others, sharing, loving family, and compassion/consideration). Mothers placed less emphasis on self-maximization, but within that category the values most frequently mentioned by mothers were working hard at school, diligence, independence, and creativity.

Other studies have reported that progressive attitudes in Jordan are associated with positive mental health, high achievement, good behaviors, creative thinking, and self-confidence. Authoritarian attitudes are associated with underachievement, deviant behaviors, and low self-esteem (Abou-Diah, 1993; El-Shamileh, 1999; Hanbali, 1989; Jebreel, 1989; Malhas & Abdouni, 1997; Mursi, 1988; Tahhan, 1990).

The Present Study

The present study addresses two research questions. First, are there differences between mothers' and fathers' attributions and attitudes within families in Jordan? Second, how highly are mothers' attributions and attitudes correlated with fathers' attributions and attitudes in Jordan? We hypothesized that there would be no differences between mothers'

and fathers' attributions and attitudes within families and that mothers' and fathers' attributions and attitudes would be highly correlated, given that the relationship between parents and children in Jordanian society is strongly influenced by Islamic and Arabic traditions, which are espoused by both mothers and fathers.

METHOD

Context

Participants were recruited from the city of Zarqa, which is located to the northeast of Jordan's capital city of Amman. Zarqa has a population of 950,000 comprising 15.5% of Jordan's population; it is the country's second largest city after Amman. The first settlement in Zarqa was in 1902 by Chechen immigrants who were displaced from the wars between the Ottoman and Russian Empires. They settled along the Zarqa River. At that time a station on the Hejaz railway was built in the new settlement; this railway station turned Zarqa into an important hub. On April 10, 1905, the Ottoman governor issued a decree that allowed Chechen immigrants to own lands on which they settled. The population then quickly grew. On November 18, 1928, the new Jordanian government issued a decree to establish the first municipal council for Zarqa. After the Jordan Frontier Force was formed in 1926, military bases were constructed in the city by the British army, and the city later became known as the "military city." Migration to Zarqa has steadily progressed since the 1940s. More than 50% of Zarqa's population migrated from the West Bank following the Six Day War. Zarqa's climate is desert-like, to a much greater degree than nearby Amman. Zarqa is Jordan's industrial center, home to over 50% of Jordanian factories. The growth of industry in the city is the result of low real estate costs and proximity to the capital, Amman. It should be noted here that although the city of Zarqa is considered diverse, the capital city of Amman is even more diverse. Therefore, the study sample does not represent all of Jordan.

Participants

After obtaining university IRB approval and approval from the appropriate Ministry of Education authorities, recruitment letters describing the study and asking parents to return a completed form with their contact information were sent home with 170 third grade students at 2 public (one for boys and one for boys and girls) and 3 private elementary schools for girls. Letters were in Arabic. A total of 150 returned forms gave permission to contact the family. Of these, interviews with 114 families were completed. For the present study, analyses were limited to the 112 families in which data were available from both the mother and the father. Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the 112 participating families. Among the 112 families who participated in the present study, 99% are married. The average age of participating mothers is 36.39, and for participating fathers is 41.81. The average level of education of participating mothers is 13.15 years, and for participating fathers 13.23 years. The average number of children in the household for participating families is 3.50. Finally, the average number of adults in the household for participating families is 2.60. On the basis of the similarities in demographic statistics between our sample and the population of Zarqa, we conclude that our sample is generally representative of the population of Zarqa.

Procedures

Interviews with mothers and fathers were conducted at schools, in participants' homes, or over the phone. Interviewers traveled to families' homes in teams of two, and each parent was interviewed by a different interviewer in a place out of hearing of the other family members. They completed a demographic questionnaire, a measure of social desirability bias (Reynolds, 1982), and two parenting measures.

The analyses in this paper focus on constructs from two measures of attributions and attitudes (see Lansford & Bornstein, 2012). First, parents completed the short form of the Parent Attribution Test (Bugental & Shennum, 1984), which was developed to measure parents' perceptions of causes of success and failure in hypothetical caregiving situations. Parents are presented with a hypothetical scenario that involves either a positive or negative interaction with a child (e.g., "Suppose you took care of a neighbor's child one afternoon and the two of you had a really good time together."). Parents then are asked to respond to a series of questions regarding reasons that the interaction was positive or negative. Parents rate on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all important*, 7 = *very important*) how important factors such as the child's disposition and the parent's behavior were in determining the quality of the interaction. The amount of power or control attributed to oneself versus children is the key dimension of interest. This measure yielded four variables: (1) attributions regarding uncontrollable success (6 items; e.g., how lucky you were in just having everything work out well); (2) attributions regarding adult-controlled failure (6 items; e.g., whether you used the wrong approach for this child); (3) attributions regarding child-controlled failure (6 items; e.g., the extent to which the child was stubborn and resisted your efforts); and (4) perceived control over failure (the difference between attributions regarding adult-controlled failure and attributions regarding child-controlled failure).

Second, parents completed the Parental Modernity Inventory (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985), which assesses parents' attitudes about childrearing and education. Each of 30 statements is rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). This instrument yielded three variables: (1) progressive attitudes (8 items; e.g., Children have a right to their own point of view and should be allowed to express it.); (2) authoritarian attitudes (22 items; e.g., The most important thing to teach children is absolute obedience to their parents.); and (3) modernity of attitudes (the difference between the progressive attitudes score and the authoritarian attitudes score). Alphas for each variable are shown in Table 2.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 2, mothers and fathers reported attributions near the scale midpoints, on average. Regarding attitudes, mothers and fathers reported greater progressive attitudes than authoritarian attitudes.

Gender Similarities and Differences in Parents' Attributions and Attitudes

Repeated-measures linear mixed models with gender of parent as the within-subjects fixed factor tested for differences between mothers and fathers in attributions for success and failure in caregiving situations and progressive versus authoritarian attitudes. Test results are presented with and without controls for mothers' and fathers' ages, education, and possible social desirability bias. Table 2 reveals no significant main effect of gender on any construct of interest. Both mothers and fathers reported similar levels of attributions and attitudes. Within-Family Correlations Between Parents' Attributions and Attitudes.

The final columns of Table 2 present bivariate correlations of mothers' attributions and attitudes with fathers' attributions and attitudes. As shown, all seven analyses revealed significant concordance between parents within a family; all remained significant after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias. Significant positive correlations were found for mothers' and fathers' attributions regarding uncontrollable success, adult-controlled failure, child-controlled failure, perceived control over failure, progressive attitudes, authoritarian attitudes, and modernity of attitudes.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined parenting attributions and attitudes among mothers and fathers in Jordan. Mothers and fathers reported similar levels of attributions and attitudes on all seven constructs of interest (uncontrollable success, adult-controlled failure, child-controlled failure, perceived control over failure, progressive attitudes, authoritarian attitudes, and modernity of attitudes). Mothers' and fathers' attributions regarding uncontrollable success, adult-controlled failure, child-controlled failure, authoritarian attitudes, and modernity of attitudes were highly correlated. Mothers' and fathers' progressive attitudes were also moderately correlated.

The overall means within the Jordan sample revealed that, on average, mothers and fathers held more progressive than authoritarian parenting attitudes. This finding makes sense in the context of modern Jordanian society where there is a cultural emphasis on individualism, which focuses on freedom, choice, and self-sufficiency. This finding is consistent with Othman, Sari, Rabayaa, and Akel's (1997) finding that Jordanian parents now value their children's behavioral independence, freedom to make their own decisions, and equality within the parent-child relationship. In addition, these findings are also consistent with research suggesting that Arab parents' attitudes about childrearing are more progressive nowadays than authoritarian (Abu Aita, 2005; Sabri, 2002; Subehi, 1994).

Progressive attitudes in Jordan are stressed in recent legislation against all types of child abuse, in addition to emergent parenting programs. One major context for parenting lies in the emergence of a National Plan of Action in early childhood care and development for the years 1993–2000 and the Jordanian Plan of Action for Children 2004–2013 (Al-Hassan & Lansford, 2010). The vision set forth in these plans is to create a safe environment that develops the capabilities of children by supporting legislation, policies, and programs that cater to the physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being of children. The National Plan of Action for Children aims at providing Jordanian children with the best possible start in life by promoting a healthy life, giving them access to quality education, and providing them with ample opportunities to develop their individual capacities in a safe and supportive environment protected from abuse, exploitation, and violence.

The mother-father similarities and within-family correlations in attributions and attitudes could be explained by legislation that encourages parents to take equal responsibility in parenting, as mentioned previously with the National Plan of Action in early childhood care and development for the years 1993–2000 and the Jordanian Plan of Action for Children 2004–2013. These findings also could be interpreted in terms of the similarities that exist between partners when they choose to get married and have children together. Khoury and Massad (1992) found that the most important variables that affected marriage decisions between couples in Jordan are social tradition, religion, education, and place of (urban versus rural) residence. These variables tend to produce more similarities between couples than differences, which might explain the significant concordance between parents within a family in their attributions and attitudes, even after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of this study is that the sample was limited to the city of Zarqa. It would be worth including a sample from Amman in future research as well as samples from rural areas. Amman is considered more liberal and modernized compared to other cities in Jordan, which might have implications for childrearing. Rural areas in Jordan tend to be more conservative and have lower socioeconomic status, which might also affect parent-parent and child-parent relationships. In addition, an important direction for future research will be

to examine not only parent gender differences but child gender differences. Also, findings concerning fathers' uncontrollable success and mothers' child-controlled failure attributions should be interpreted with caution due to their low alphas.

Conclusions

Jordanian mothers and fathers reported both mean level similarities as well as high levels of agreement on parenting attributions and attitudes. Large effect sizes were found for concordance between parents in the same family on all seven attributions and attitudes, even after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias. This substantial agreement between parents in Jordanian families likely has implications for coparenting, with Jordanian parents presenting a consistent and unified parenting unit to children with respect to attributions regarding successes and failures in caregiving situations and attitudes related to parenting.

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TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics of Children and Families

Child's gender (% female)	46%
Child's age in years	8.46 (.50)
Mother's age in years	36.39 (5.97)
Father's age in years	41.81 (5.51)
Mother's education in years	13.15 (2.19)
Father's education in years	13.23 (3.17)
Parents' marital status (% married)	99%
Number of children in household	3.50 (1.51)
Number of adults in household	2.60 (1.21)

M (*SD*)

TABLE 2

Parenting Attributions and Attitudes: Alphas, Tests of Gender Differences, and Correlations for Mothers and Fathers

	Mothers α	Fathers α	Mothers M (SD)	Fathers M (SD)	F	F^a	d	d^a	r	r^a
Attributions										
Uncontrollable success	.61	.54	5.52 (1.08)	5.50 (.95)	.07	.42	.02	.06	.56***	.56***
Adult-controlled failure	.64	.66	3.89 (.86)	3.78 (1.00)	1.41	.29	.12	.05	.45***	.50***
Child-controlled failure	.49	.63	3.95 (.79)	3.90 (.76)	.38	.29	.07	.06	.37***	.40***
Perceived control over failure	N/A	N/A	−.06 (1.23)	−.12 (1.22)	.25	.01	.05	.01	.48***	.49***
Attitudes										
Progressive attitudes	.70	.63	3.21 (.39)	3.16 (.36)	1.88	.64	.14	.08	.38***	.39***
Authoritarian attitudes	.70	.78	2.70 (.31)	2.72 (.35)	.29	.36	−.05	−.06	.50***	.50***
Modernity of attitudes	N/A	N/A	.51 (.49)	.44 (.42)	2.80	1.40	.15	.11	.55***	.56***

Note. Ns range from 97–112. Repeated-measures linear mixed models with gender of parent as the within-subjects factor.

Cohen's d was computed using Equation 3 for paired samples in Dunlap, Cortina, Vaslow, and Burke (1996).

^{a}Controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias.

*
  $p < .05.$

**
  $p < .01.$

***
  $p < .001.$