

Involving in parenting practices in a more active and flexible way: Study on the Parental Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (PAAQ)

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INTRODUCTION

Parents face several transitions and challenges with their children during childhood years. Although these developmental transitions are normative, they may also be difficult and even painful. Experiential avoidance (EA) may occur in parenting context when parents are unwilling to experience psychological distress and make deliberate efforts to avoid, stop, minimize or control that emotional distress. Literature has shown EA has a negative impact on both parents and children and on their interaction, thus it seems important to identify the presence of EA. This study aimed to explore the factor structure of the Parental Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (PAAQ; Cheron et al., 2009), which assesses parental EA when confronting negative emotions of their children, and to analyse its psychometric properties in a sample of Portuguese parents of school-aged children.

METHOD

Participants

The sample included 381 parents, specifically 350 women (91.9%) and 31 men (8.1%). The sample age ranged between 21 and 65 years old ($M = 39.86$, $SD = 6.45$). Participants showed a mean of years of education of 13.44 ($SD = 3.51$).

Procedures

The sample was collected through online platforms related to parenting interests and also from middle and secondary schools of their children in centre region of Portugal. Ethical and deontological requirements were followed. Confidentiality, voluntarily and anonymity were assured.

Instruments

Parental Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (PAAQ; Cheron, Ehrenreich, & Pincus, 2009) is a 15-item self-report questionnaire encompassing two subscales measuring parents' unwillingness to witness their child negative emotion experiences (Unwillingness Subscale) as well as a parents' inability to effectively manage parental reactions towards their child's affect (Inaction Subscale). Parents are asked to rate the degree to which the following statements are true for them on a seven-point Likert-type ranging from 1 (Never True) to 7 (Always True). The PAAQ Total score, comprised of a combination of these two subscales, represents parents overall degree of parental experiential avoidance.

Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ; Bond et al., 2011) is a 7-item scale answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true). This scale reflects a single domain of psychological inflexibility with higher scores indicating greater psychological inflexibility, or experiential avoidance. In the current study the internal reliability was good ($\alpha = .86$).

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) is a 25-item scale and is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire for completion by the parents of 4-16 years old children. Only the total score was used in the present study, by adding the four negative subscales in order to assess internalizing and externalizing problems. The internal reliability was low ($\alpha = .60$).

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovidond & Lovibond, 1995) is a 21-item scale that assesses depression, anxiety and stress symptoms. Each item is rated on a 4 point scale (0-3), with higher scores representing high levels of symptoms. All the three subscales showed good internal reliability ($\alpha = .89$ for each one).

RESULTS

Table 1
Pearson Correlations between PAAQ total score and subscales, psychological inflexibility (AAQ), depression, anxiety and stress symptoms (DASS-21), internalizing and externalizing problems (SDQ).

	PAAQ	F1 Inaction	F2 Unwillingness
F1 Inaction (PAAQ)	.51		
F2 Unwillingness (PAAQ)	.94	.20	
AAQ	.48	.26	.45
Depression (DASS-21)	.26	.21	.22
Anxiety (DASS-21)	.24	ns	.21
Stress (DASS-21)	.29	ns	.27
SDQ	.29	ns	.28

Note. The Pearson correlation coefficients are statistical significant at $p < .001$.
ns = nonsignificant

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RESULTS (CONT.)

Table 2

Results from Exploratory Factor Analysis, factor loadings, communalities (h^2), mean (M), standard deviation (SD), item-total correlations (r) and Cronbach's alphas if item deleted for each of the PAAQ items (N = 381)

Items	Factor loading		h^2	M	SD	Item-total r	Cronbach alpha if item deleted
	F1	F2					
10. Despite my doubts, I feel as though I can set a plan for managing my child's feelings.	0.81		0.67	5.37	1.29	.33	.68
13. If I get frustrated with my child, then I can still help him or her.	0.79		0.64	5.93	1.20	.30	.68
8. I try hard to avoid having my child feel depressed or anxious.	0.67		0.54	5.84	1.37	.47	.66
1. I am able to take action about my child's fears, worries, and feelings even if I am uncertain what the right thing is to do.	0.61		0.64	5.49	1.19	.29	.68
6. In order for my child to do something important, I have to have all my doubts about it worked out.	0.56		0.40	5.27	1.59	.41	.66
17. I often catch myself daydreaming about things I've done with my child and what I would do differently next time.		0.64	0.41	4.18	1.66	.39	.67
19. When I compare myself to other parents, it seems that most of them are handling their lives better than I do.		0.61	0.49	3.14	1.75	.19	.70
11. If I could magically remove all the painful experiences my child has had in his or her life, I would do so.		0.57	0.61	4.67	1.98	.41	.66
9. It is bad if my child feels anxious.		0.54	0.60	4.69	1.74	.43	.66
14. Worries can get in the way of my child's success.		0.53	0.37	4.76	1.67	.38	.67
3. I try to suppress thoughts and feelings about my child that I don't like by just not thinking about them.		0.50	0.42	3.87	2.02	.32	.68
2. When I feel depressed or anxious, I am unable to help my child manage their fears, worries, or feelings.			0.44	2.98	1.48	.09	.71
TOTAL (reversed items: 1, 10, 13)				46.61	7.88		.70
Explained variance	26%	17%					
Cronbach alpha	.76	.63					

Test-retest reliability

Results showed an adequate temporal stability of the PAAQ in a 4-week interval ($r = .51$, $N = 22$).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The Portuguese version of the PAAQ showed a two-factor structure similar to the one found for the original version (Inaction and Unwillingness) with satisfactory internal consistencies for both subscales. An adequate test-retest reliability for a 4-week interval was found. PAAQ revealed a significant positive association with experiential avoidance, negative emotional symptoms (depression, anxiety and stress) and the parents' perception of psychological difficulties experienced by their children.

Despite some limitations, this study highlights the importance of assessing EA in the parenting context to deal with child's experience of negative emotions. Our results may encourage further studies for development and refinement of psychological assessment tools in the parenting context

MAIN REFERENCE:

Cheron, D. M., Ehrenreich, J. T., & Pincus, D. B. (2009). Assessment of parental experiential avoidance in a clinical sample of children with anxiety disorders. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 40, 383-403. doi:10.1007/s10578-009-0135-z