Abstract

Introduction: The study of the association between specific characteristics of family environments and different types of psychopathology may contribute to our understanding of these complex disorders and ultimately inform therapeutics. Objective: To compare the family characteristics of four groups: typically developing children; children with anxiety disorders only; children with externalizing disorders only; and children with both anxiety and externalizing disorders. Methods: This study enrolled 115 individuals from the community. Child psychiatrists made psychiatric diagnoses using a structured clinical interview. The Family Environment scale was used to evaluate six domains of family function. Results: The group with both anxiety and externalizing disorders had higher levels of conflict in family environment and lower levels of organization when compared with typically developing children. In addition, internalizing and externalizing symptoms were positively associated with conflict and negatively with organization. Maternal depressive and anxious symptoms were also associated with higher conflict and lower organization scores. Conclusion: An important between-group difference in comorbid cases of anxiety and behavioral disorders suggests that children with this comorbidity are potential candidates for family interventions to address family conflicts and organizational aspects.

Keywords
Anxiety, phobias, family, comorbidity, ADHD.