

Culture, Parenting Practices, and Child Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

- Previous research suggests the **COVID-19 pandemic** has:
 - Increased parent and child stress and depression^{3,4}
 - Decreased family cohesion, leading to child maladjustment⁴
 - Disrupted family routines, resulting in greater family conflict and loneliness⁵
- **Restrictive** or authoritative parenting practices: high parental expectations and parental control.
 - In prior research, restrictive parenting has been associated with child internalizing and externalizing problems⁶.
- **Cultural tightness**: a measure of conformity and social cohesion within a country.
 - Tight countries have stronger social norms and low tolerance for deviance.
 - Previous research suggests tight countries may respond better to the pandemic because of greater willingness to cooperate with norms⁷.

We **predict** that restrictive parenting practices during the pandemic are associated with child anxiety, and that cultural tightness moderates the relation between parenting and child anxiety.

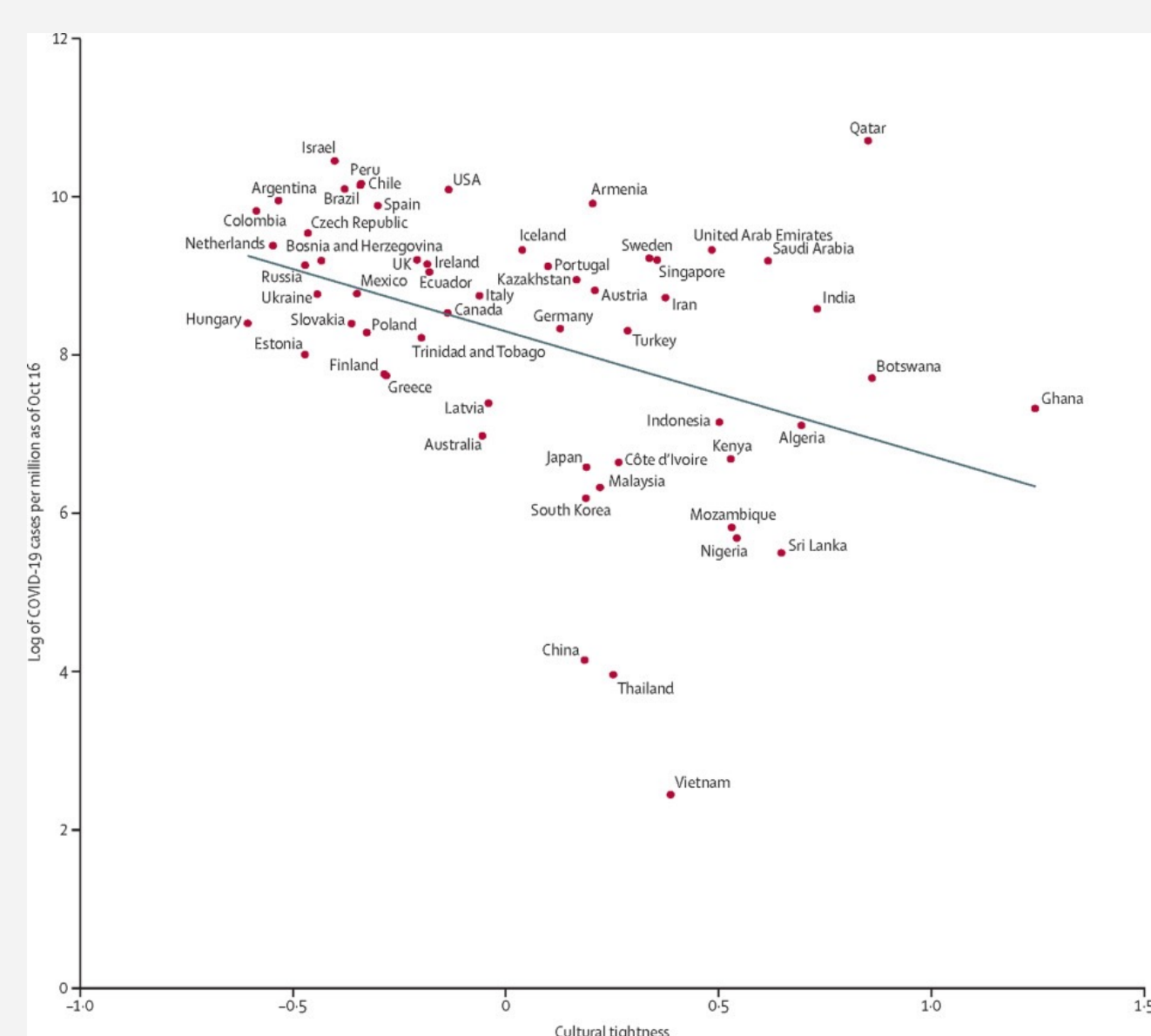


Figure 1. The association of cultural tightness and logged COVID-19 cases per million as of Oct 16, 2020 (Gelfand et al., 2021)

Method

- Data from **COPES** (Coronavirus Outbreak Parenting and Emotions Study), a study on parents' and children's emotional and behavioral outcomes during COVID-19
- Cleaned and merged 12 datasets from 6 months and 7 countries in SPSS
- Developed a shortened form of the CoRonaVirus Health Impact Survey (CRISIS) questionnaire



Table 1	
Descriptive Statistics for Children and Parents from the COPES	
Variables	N = 2179
Country	
USA	37.40%
ITA	6.50%
CHN	13.15%
TUR	23.10%
CAN	5.60%
KOR	5.90%
POR	8.30%
Child gender	
Female	52.30%
Male	45.10%
Missing	2.60%
Child age at Month 1 (months)	61.02

Cultural tightness was assessed as a moderator of parenting practices on child general and COVID-specific anxiety.

- Restrictiveness was measured using the Child-Rearing Practices Report (CRPR)
- Tightness was measured using the Cultural Tightness scale from Gelfand and colleagues (2021).

Linear regressions were performed for each outcome variable averaged across the first three months:

1. Child COVID worry (CRISIS)
2. Child Anxiety Life Interference Scale (CALI_Home)
3. Generalized Preschool Anxiety Scale (PAS)

Results

Outcome variable: Child COVID Worry (CRISIS)

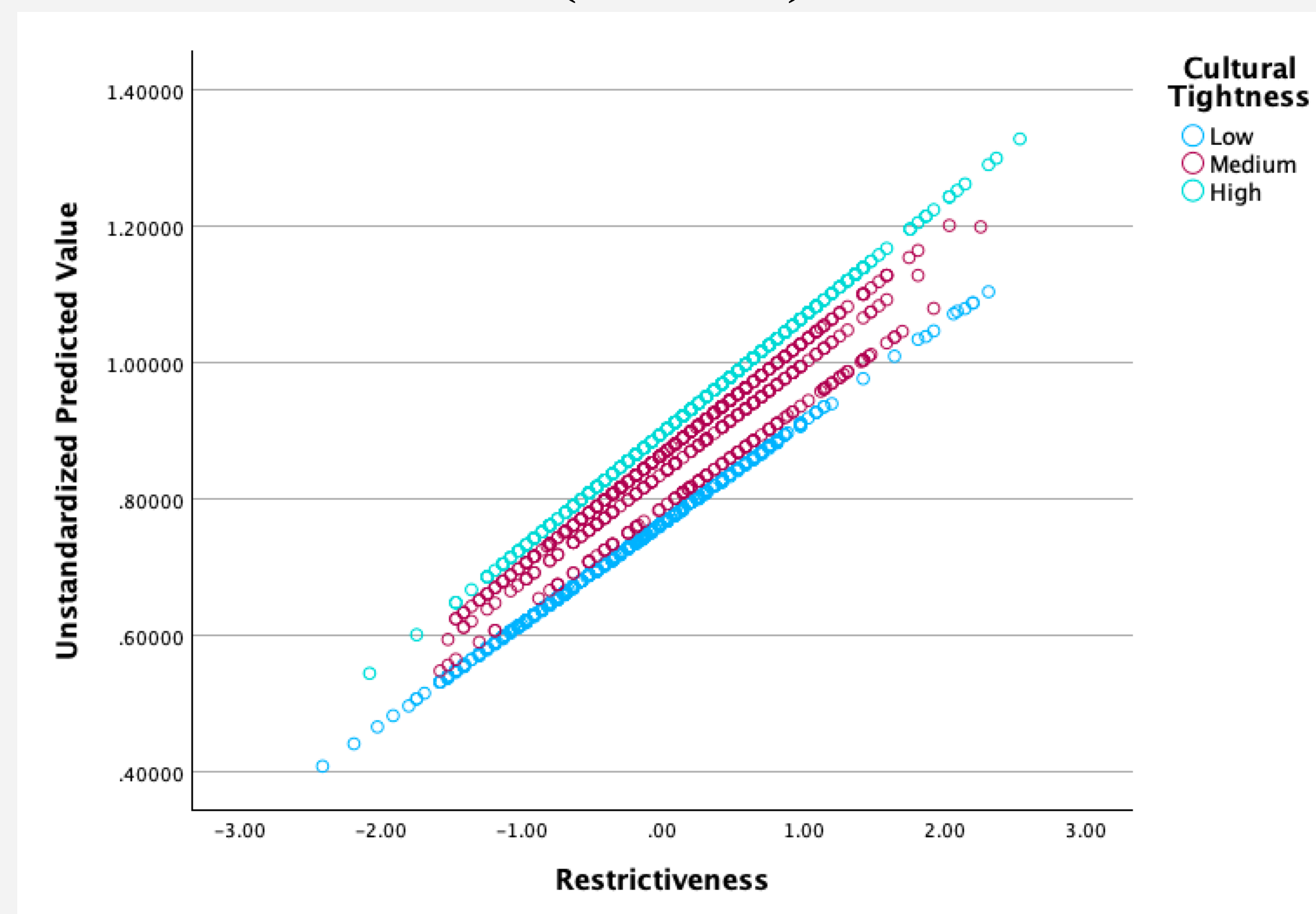


Figure 2. Cultural tightness predicted parent reports of child COVID worry ($p = 0.002$), as did self-reported restrictive parenting ($p < 0.001$). However, the interaction between tightness and parenting was not significant ($p = 0.697$).

Outcome variable: Child anxiety from home interference (CALI)

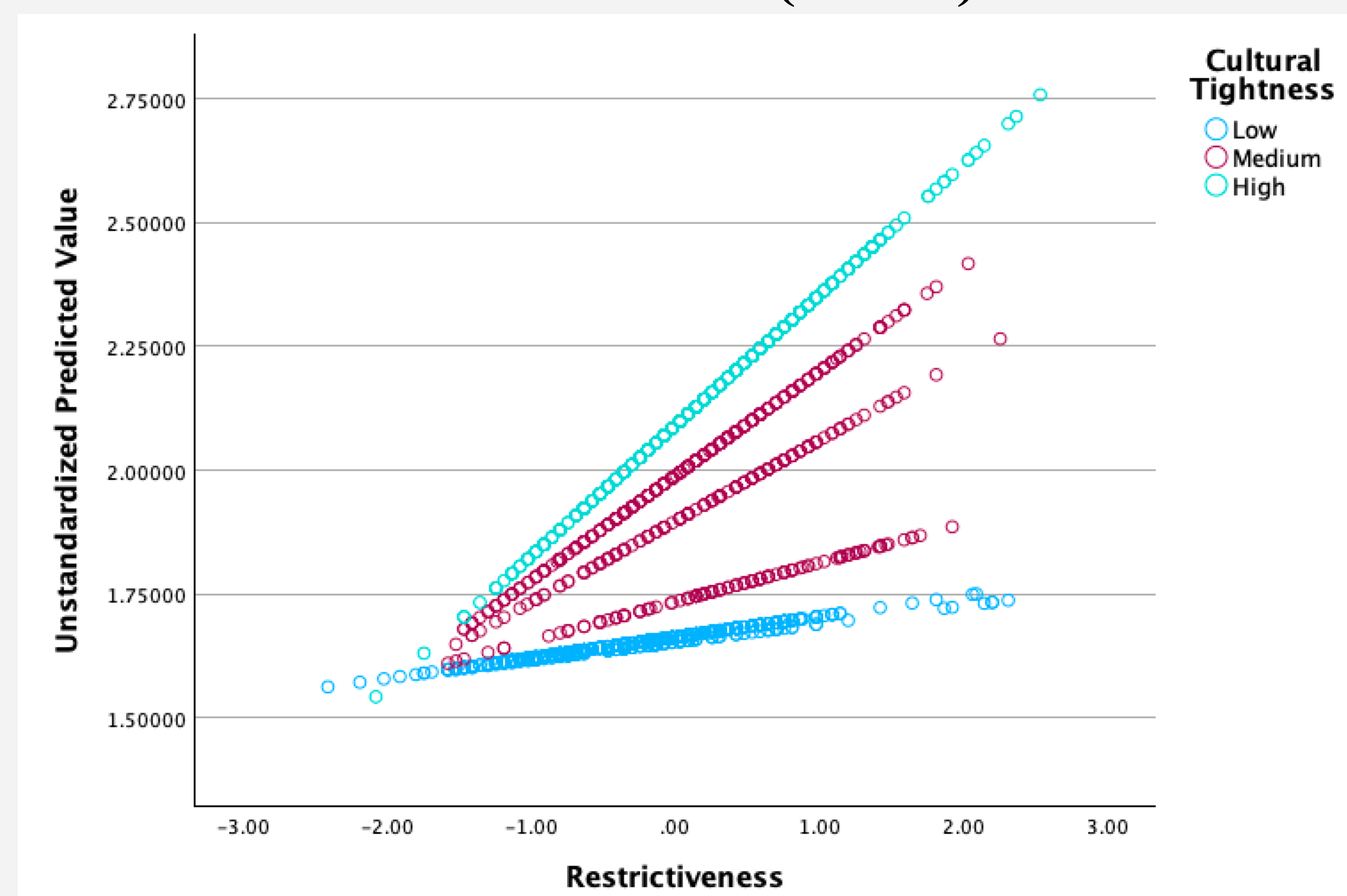


Figure 3. Cultural tightness and restrictive parenting both predicted child anxiety from home interference ($p < 0.001$, $p < 0.001$). The interaction between tightness and parenting was significant ($p < 0.001$) such that the relationship between restrictiveness and child anxiety was stronger for families living in tight cultures.

Outcome variable: Child general anxiety (PAS)

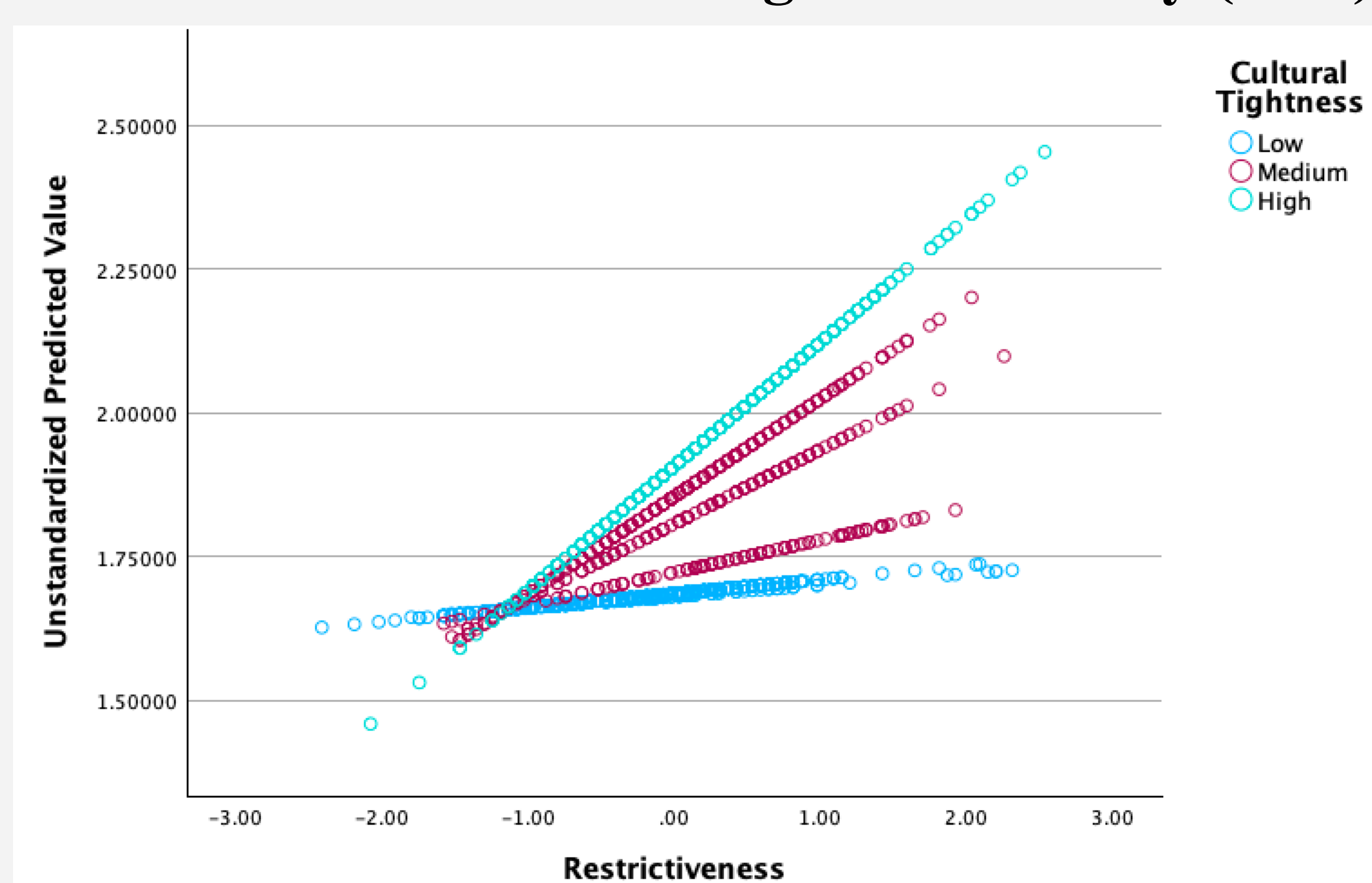


Figure 4. Cultural tightness and restrictive parenting both predicted child general anxiety ($p < 0.001$, $p < 0.001$). The interaction between tightness and parenting was significant ($p < 0.001$), such that children in tight cultures had higher anxiety levels in response to restrictive parenting.

Discussion

- Both cultural tightness and self-reported restrictive parenting **predicted** parent reports of child COVID worry, general anxiety, and child anxiety interference within the home environment
- The interaction between cultural tightness and restrictive parenting **was significant for generalized child anxiety**, such that children of restrictive parents in tight cultures experienced higher anxiety levels than those in loose cultures.
 - This interaction was only significant for general anxiety, rather than COVID-specific worry.
- Societal-level factors of social control and rigidity appeared to exacerbate the negative effect of overcontrolling parenting practices on children's mental outcomes.
- Results suggest that similar parenting practices may differently affect children's emotional adjustment to a global crisis based on cultural characteristics.

Limitations & Recommendations

- The COPES collected data throughout 6 months of the pandemic, but due to high levels of attrition in months 4-6, only the first three months of data were used in this study.
 - As a result, more long-term trajectories of parenting practices and child anxiety during the pandemic may have been missed.
- Reliance on parent-reported outcomes for self and for child introduces potential bias.
 - Methods were exclusively questionnaire-based due to practical limitations of collecting family observational data or performing lab tasks during the pandemic.

Future Directions

- The finding of the potential protectiveness of certain parenting practices in specific cultures can guide the development of culturally sensitive intervention strategies for child maladjustment in future global crises.
- Future analyses with this dataset should examine other family-level and cultural influences on parents' and children's mental health, such as severity of health-related and financial impact of COVID, perceived social support during the pandemic, and trust in social institutions and other people.

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