

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# PARENT-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS AND ITS ASSOCIATION TO ADOLESCENTS' SELF-ESTEEM

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**Psychoanalysts believed that early mother-child relationships form the prototype of all future relationships and the outcome of adolescents development depends on their ego-strength. Object relations theory believed that intrapsychic process mediates interpersonal interaction to develop a sense of secure self and adolescents must relinquish the internalized other in order to develop a more mature sense of self. Social-relation theory believed that mothers and fathers provide different socialization experiences. Self-esteem depends on the functioning of the whole family in which adolescent is intimately related to the dyadic relationship in a family. There is an association between interparental conflict and adolescent's self-esteem and problem behaviour.**

*Key words : parent, adolescent, self-esteem*

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### Introduction

Parent-child relationships have been recognized as significant to child development for decades. This paper is going to view parent-adolescent relationships from psychoanalytic, object-relation and social-relation perspectives. This concept has evolved throughout the history as scholars gain greater understanding on the way it interacts with other self-concepts. Self-esteem as defined on how one's feeling of worth operates on skills, achievements, appearance, likeability and appearance. These operators are imparted on children since they are young together with what they experience via learning operations. Impartment of self-concept can be appreciated by understanding the relationship between primary caregivers and the self. One major hindrance to a proper impartment is interparental conflicts.

### *Psychoanalytic perspective*

Freud (1) elaborated stories around unresolved conflict between mother and child, fears of an experience of physical and psychological abandonment and the consequence of these for abnormal mental health. In his psychoanalytic

discourse, he had established that the early mother-child relationship form the prototype of all future relationship. In psychosexual theory of development, for instance, Freud placed special emphasis on parental relationships and later psychopathology.

In later psychoanalytic work, Bios (2) classified the changes in structure of the mind namely instinct, ego and superego into phases that extend over roughly a ten-year span. According to him, the primary task in adolescence years is psychic restructuring necessitated by the sexual transformation of puberty. The transformation of instinct, ego, superego and ego ideal results in the formation of a stable character. Adolescent behaviour, then, is attributed to the regression and defenses arising out of restimulated oedipal conflict and withdrawal of libido from the threatening parental images back into the ego. Psychoanalysts, in general believed that the outcome of development depend on the child's ego strength, the strength of the instincts and the adequacy of the child's defenses.

Slomowitz (3) argued that in early adolescence, the child begins to withdraw interest in the parents as primary love objects. Withdrawal of libido from internalized parental images leaves the child with a sense of alienation. Parents are

depreciated because their actual and internalized control over the child has been lessened. The idealization process in early adolescence is explained in term of the child's investment of narcissistic libido in others. It is now that the internalized parental standard representing the superego are revised. The more generalized controlling agency, the ego ideal, allows greater autonomy and flexibility while continuing to give life meaning and regulate self-esteem.

### ***Object-relation perspective***

Proponents of object relations theory such as Skoe (4) and Mahler (5) are concerned with how intrapsychic process mediates interpersonal interaction and with how differentiation of the sense of self develops and changes over the course of the life span. The internalization of a respective caregiver enables the child to feel secure when the caregiver is not physically present. This is identical to what the behavioral theorist such as Ainsworth described to as a secure attachment.

On another issue, object relation theorists attribute mother-child conflicts to a mother's sense of frustration arising from her own insufficient nurturing which in turn frustrates the child where need for care and protection is compromised.

Melanie Klein (6) work with children that led her to hypothesize that from earliest day of life, the infant has a primitive relationship with the mother based on fantasies arising from physical and emotional needs. As a mother capable of remaining calm, loving and reassuring, enables the infant to internalize the potential splitting experience of loving the comforting, nurturing mother and hating the bad mother who frustrates her, thus gaining personal integration and a more realistic picture of her internal world.

As an analogy to adolescents' world, Peter Blos (7) appreciate the same parallels with adolescents. He believed that adolescents must relinquish the internalized other in order to develop a more mature sense of self.

### ***Social-relation perspective***

Collin and Russell (8) observed that mothers and fathers provide different socialization experiences for children and adolescents. Mothers report more intense discussions, a greater number of conflicts and a less positive relationship with adolescents than do fathers. Wiersen et. al. (9) argued that mothers are more involved in parenting their adolescents than are fathers and as a consequence

come into conflict with them more often. Similar findings were reported by Ameida and Galambos (10) who reported in relation to mothers, fathers exhibit less affect and have fewer and less intense conflicts with adolescents. These deficits are attributed to fathers being less involved with their adolescents.

Rex Forehand and Sarah Nousiainen (11) examined three dimensions of parenting i.e. acceptance, firm control and psychological control exhibited by mothers and fathers among 70 adolescents and their parents. They found that (a) mothers reported exhibiting each parenting dimension more than fathers; (b) the father's acceptance score was the primary predictor of adolescent's functioning outside the home; (c) the mother's and the father's parenting styles interact to predict some areas of adolescent functioning.

### ***Concept of self and self-esteem***

As children grow, the concept of self becomes important. Mc Nab and Kramer (12) narrated on how developmental theorists had speculated that autonomy of the self is attained via series of painful crises by which the individual achieves separation from others and reaches an inner sense of individualization. The struggle for separation reaches its peak during adolescence for girls for whom the process is complicated by shared gender. The separation process was noted to reach its peak earlier for boys.

Self-esteem is assessed with a number of important psychological phenomena, both positive and negative. High self-esteem has been associated with productive coping strategies, enhanced motivation and positive emotional state. Person with low self-esteem would involve more conflicts and poor coping skills to life stresses.

Researchers such as Cox and Paley (13) begun to explore the differential influence of family relationship and support on adolescent girls' and boys' self-esteem. In accordance to the systems view of the family, the functioning of the whole family in which adolescent is one of its members is intimately related to the dyadic relationship in a family such as the relationship quality intrinsic to the parent-child dyad and husband-wife dyad. Proponents of system theorists like Stafford and Bayer (14) further hypothesized that there are mutual influences between the dyadic relationship (e.g. parent-child relationship) and the functioning of the whole family at the system level. Systems are composed of objects, attributes, relationship and environment.

### **Interparental conflicts**

Emery and Leary (15) have found that there are consistent and important association between interparental conflict, adolescents self-esteem and problem behaviour. Buehler et al. (16) have shown that interpersonal conflict accounted for 4% to 25% of the variance in adolescent maladjustment. On the other hand, Gryth and Fincham (17) reported a higher prevalence rate of 79% association between interparental conflicts with adolescent problem behaviour.

Buehler et al. (16) also asserted that the link between parental relationships and social behaviour or children maladjustment was stronger for fathers than for mothers. They suggested that mothers tend to be more sensitive to the issue of predictability in children than the fathers. Several other reviews have concluded that the association between interparental conflict and adolescent's self-esteem and problem behaviour is stronger for boys than girls. However, Buehler et al. (16) didn't support this conclusion because in their study they have found no conclusive evidence to suggest boys may have higher externalizing problem and girls may have higher internalizing problems related to interparental conflict.

### **Biases and limitations**

The works reviewed seem to concentrate on studies from the west. It is a common knowledge that parental styles and relationship differ from culture to culture. Studies in the non-western culture may be written in their own language, which is unavailable for this review. Another aspect that is also influential in modifying relationships is religious and spiritual belief and the subsequent religious-spiritual related perception and behaviour. In most religions, the followers are guided to perform certain codes and conduct based on their belief, which in turn governs their family and social life. Generalizing what is a phenomenon in the west to different cultures is always an issue in social science research.

### **Summary**

In summary, studies on parent-adolescent relationship have always been appealing due to the fact that they could be viewed from multiple perspectives and closely related to self-esteem. Interparental conflicts do have association to adolescents' self-esteem and problem behaviour. However, those finding must be interpreted with cautions due to religious and cultural differences.

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