

An analysis of parent-child relationship as perceived by adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Parent-child relationship plays an important role in the psychological well being of the adolescent. The present study aims to explore the adolescents' perception of their relationship with their parents. The sample comprised of 100 school going adolescents (50 boys and 50 girls) who were in the age range of 16-18 years and selected from two schools of Ludhiana city, during the session 2015-2016. Parent-child relationship scale (PCR) developed by Rao (2001) was used to assess the characteristic behaviour of the parents as experienced by their children. The results of the study revealed that sons in contrast to daughters perceived parents to be more demanding and giving more object punishment. On the other hand, daughters in contrast to sons perceived their fathers to be more protecting and mothers to be more loving and symbolic reward giving. Adolescents perceived their mothers more symbolically punitive as well as more loving towards them than their fathers. Also, sons perceived their mothers to be more protecting and less neglecting than their fathers.

INTRODUCTION

The early environment of the child includes his family and close relationships which play a significant role in forming a child's personality. Then child progresses into a varied and complex socio-cultural and physical environment. This is the time where he faces and deals with problems and requires a fairly good and guiding relationship from his nearest people so that he can learn new competencies, can develop usable assumptions about himself and his world and control his behaviour to avoid social disapproval and punishment (Dungrani and Vaishnav, 2008).

Parenting can be explained in terms of behaviours a mother or a father owes toward the child and duties he

or she fulfills as a parent for the child. It is fundamental to understand the techniques parents use in their everyday interactions with the child as the parenting styles adopted by them are essential in the development of the children.

There are various ways in which parenting styles have been conceptualized and understood on the basis of love, responsiveness, demand, neglect and control. (Coolahan *et al.*, 2002). Baumrind (1966) identified three parenting styles: authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian. Authoritative parents are more involved and sensitive, nurture their children and encourage autonomy. They are responsive and discipline children through reasoning. Authoritarian parents are extremely strict, assert power and control and reject behaviours without reason. They emphasize on following rules and

fail to express behaviours of warmth toward their children.

On the contrary, permissive parents are less demanding, non-controlling and take negligible punitive actions. They rarely establish rules and guidelines for their children. Indeed, because of the diversity of behavioural patterns that could characterize the permissive parenting style, Maccoby and Martin (1983) proposed that this approach to parenting could best be thought of as two distinct types: Indulgent (e.g., "If my child wants something, I give it to her") and neglectful (e.g., "I really don't know what my child is upto. I don't really keep close tabs on her").

Parenting is a lifetime task. The issues, patterns and nature of responsibilities involved in this task keep on varying as the child grows. These variations can be attributed to the change in needs, wants and stage of the children. The most challenging period for any parent is when the child reaches the age of adolescence.

Parent-child relationship plays an important role in the psychological well being of the adolescent. Though, Videon (2005) stresses that this impact has been largely overlooked as compared to other influential sources. Williams and Kelly (2005) assert, "little is known about the different roles that mothers and fathers play during adolescent development" (p. 171). Phares (1996) claims that fathers are especially under-represented in researches exploring family relationships and functions.

Patterns of interactions significantly vary between adolescents and their fathers and adolescents and their mothers. There is a huge difference in the way fathers and mother respond to the needs of their children. For instance, Videon (2005) suggested that mothers share an intimate relationship with their children, where as father-child relationships are oriented more toward leisure activities. It was also stressed that the association between father-child relations and children's well being is largely ignored. Moreover, there are ample studies on relationship with fathers and mothers separately, but researches exploring joint assessment of father and mothers are scarce (Milevsky *et al.*, 2007).

The quality of parent-child relationship reaches a rather crucial stage when a youngster attains the teenage (Dasgupta and Basu, 2002). The emotional storminess of the teenagers is difficult for both parents and the teens. Fast social changes, complexities around them affected adolescent's psychological development and any kind

of deprivation in the family adds more confusion (Mathur and Prateek, 2003).

Kajal and Kaur (2001) investigated the prevalent trend of parent-child relationship in families of middle income group. The results indicated that boys perceived as well as expressed greater aggression and parental strictness in comparison with girls. Boys perceived their fathers as more affectionate whereas girls perceived their mothers as more affectionate. Adolescents in general perceived their fathers as more competent and indulgent as compared to the mothers.

Sangwan (2002) studied adolescents' perception of parental attitude in 180 adolescent boys and girls. The results revealed that both boys and girls perceived their parents positively, but boys had higher scores on parental concentration and over protection whereas girls had much higher scores on parental acceptance.

Rai *et al.* (2009) studied the perceived parental rearing style and personality among 100 Khasi adolescents, a distinct tribe and a matrilineal society of Meghalaya State from North-Eastern region of India. The results revealed that boys had significantly more rejection from father as compared to girls and girls showed significantly better emotional warmth in comparison with boys from father. The boys and girls did not differ significantly on the factors of over protection and favouring for father. No reliable difference was ascertained between boys and girls on rejection, emotional warmth, over protection and favouring for mother.

Intergenerational conflict was also related to the parents' acceptance and rejection of children. Sinha and Mishra (2007) found that parental acceptance was positively related with control, intimacy and admiration whereas rejection was positively related with conflict. Parental behaviours were most likely to produce desired outcomes if and when they were perceived similarly by children and parents (Tein *et al.*, 1994). Parental behaviour perceived by children was a very important factor in personality (Singh *et al.*, 2007 and Tein *et al.*, 1994). Singh *et al.* (2007) reported that adolescents who perceived behaviour as loving developed good personality and good social contact more outgoing, more intelligent, emotionally stable, tender minded, competitive whereas who perceived parental behaviour as rejecting/neglecting developed personality like reserved, less intelligent, shy in nature, serious, timid

etc.

Thus, there lies a difference in the perception of maternal and paternal relationship of boys and girls. Disparity also seems to lie in the behaviour perceived by the children and actual behaviour of parents toward them.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was carried out on a sample comprising 100 school going adolescents who were in the age range of 16-18 years, selected from two schools of Ludhiana city, during the session 2015-2016. Purposive cum random sampling technique was used for selection of the sample. Purposively two urban schools namely B.C.M. Arya Model Senior Secondary School, Shastri Nagar and D.A.V. Public School, B.R.S. Nagar were selected for the study. The Principals of the selected schools were contacted with the request to seek permission to work in their schools and the purpose of study was explained to them. After procuring permission from the Principals of the schools, a list of adolescents in the age range of 16-18 years from classes 11th and 12th was prepared with the help of class teachers. Thereafter, the sample of 100 adolescents was selected using simple random sampling procedure. The sample was equally distributed over both the genders (boys=50 and girls=50).

Parent-child relationship Scale developed by Rao (2001) was used to assess the characteristic behaviour of the parents as experienced by their children, that is, it measured the quality of the paternal and maternal relationship with children. The scale contained 100 items distributed over following ten different dimensions namely, protecting, symbolic punishment, rejecting, object punishment, demanding, indifferent, symbolic

reward, loving, object reward and neglecting.

Each dimension discussed above consists of ten items. Items of the scale are arranged in the same order as the dimensions and they rotate in a cycle through the scale. The child is supposed to score for each item for both mother and father separately. Three items in the scale include different statements for the father and mother due to the variation in maternal and paternal relationship with children. It is a five point rating scale ranging from:

Score on each dimension is calculated by summing the scores of all the items under that particular dimension. Thus, ten scores for mother and ten scores for father are calculated separately for each respondent.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Data furnished in Table 1 depicts gender-wise differences in perception of parent-child relationship across various dimensions with fathers. Significant differences were observed protecting (t-value=2.25; $p<0.05$), object punishment (t-value=3.49; $p<0.01$) and demanding (t-value=2.36; $p<0.05$) dimensions of PCR. Girls perceived their fathers to be more protecting than boys in their behaviour. This result is in line with the study of Bhaskar and Komal (2015), who in their research on 600 adolescent boys and girls also found that fathers were more protecting toward the girls than the boys.

Further, sons claimed to receive more object punishment from fathers than daughters. This might be because the sons were considered physically stronger than the daughters, and therefore, were awarded more physical punishment than the girls. Perusal of data presented in Table 1 also revealed that the sons perceived

Sr. No.	Dimensions of father-child relationship	Sons (n ₁ =50)		Daughters (n ₂ =50)		t-value
		Mean	± SD	Mean	± SD	
1.	Protecting	38.80	± 4.09	40.90	± 5.17	2.25**
2.	Symbolic punishment	28.24	± 6.77	26.12	± 6.41	1.61
3.	Rejecting	19.92	± 6.84	18.04	± 7.23	1.34
4.	Object punishment	20.40	± 7.26	15.52	± 6.72	3.49***
5.	Demanding	29.50	± 8.23	25.74	± 7.72	2.36**
6.	Indifferent	27.30	± 5.42	26.48	± 4.57	0.82
7.	Symbolic reward	35.46	± 7.17	36.80	± 7.67	0.90
8.	Loving	36.98	± 6.79	39.02	± 7.17	1.46
9.	Object reward	33.18	± 8.22	34.98	± 7.57	1.14
10.	Neglecting	20.80	± 5.42	21.04	± 5.82	0.21

** and *** indicate significance of values at $P<0.05$ and 0.01 , respectively.

fathers to be more demanding than the daughters. Thus, more leniency was shown toward the daughters in terms of expectations and more demands were made from sons in their academic achievements and career than the daughters. These findings are in tune with a study by Pandey (2005) who reported that parental behaviour changed with respect to the gender of the child. Boys perceived their parents as more dominating in comparison with the girls while perception on loving variable was nearly the same.

Data presented in Table 2 display the perceptual differences in gender regarding relationship with mothers. Across all dimensions of parent-child relationship, the mean scores (Mean±SD) of sons and daughters were found comparable except for the object punishment, demanding, symbolic reward and love dimensions of PCR. Statistically highly significant differences (t-value=3.18; p<0.01) were observed in

object punishment dimension as perceived by sons and daughters. As compared to daughters, sons perceived their mothers to be using more of object punishment as well as demanding attitude (t-value=2.03; p<0.05) towards them. These results are in line with fathers' relationship with sons and daughters. Therefore, both fathers and mothers were more demanding with their sons than daughters and accorded more punishment by objective means to sons as compared to daughters. Similar findings are also reported by Sharma (2012) in her study who stated that boys scored significantly higher on object punishment than girls. Further data depicted that daughters received more symbolic reward (t-value=1.67; p<0.10) and love (t-value=1.82; p<0.10) from mothers in comparison to sons.

Data presented in Table 3 highlighted the sons' perception of their relationship with their mother and father across ten dimensions of parenting. Data depicted

Sr. No.	Dimensions of mother-child relationship	Sons (n ₁ =50)		Daughters (n ₂ =50)		t-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1.	Protecting	41.64	± 3.79	42.48	± 5.30	0.91
2.	Symbolic punishment	30.84	± 7.12	28.66	± 6.45	1.60
3.	Rejecting	19.16	± 6.20	17.58	± 7.45	1.15
4.	Object punishment	21.84	± 7.32	17.12	± 7.51	3.18***
5.	Demanding	31.28	± 7.31	28.20	± 7.82	2.03**
6.	Indifferent	27.46	± 5.23	26.00	± 4.56	1.49
7.	Symbolic reward	35.80	± 5.56	37.90	± 6.96	1.67*
8.	Loving	39.32	± 5.18	41.42	± 6.32	1.82*
9.	Object reward	34.56	± 7.19	35.38	± 7.79	0.55
10.	Neglecting	18.78	± 4.79	20.02	± 7.53	0.98

*, ** and *** indicate significance of values at P<0.10, <0.05 and <0.01, respectively

Sr. No.	Dimensions of parent-child relationship	Fathers (n ₁ =50)		Mothers (n ₂ =50)		t-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1.	Protecting	38.8	± 4.09	41.64	± 3.79	3.60***
2.	Symbolic punishment	28.24	± 6.77	30.84	± 7.12	1.87*
3.	Rejecting	19.92	± 6.84	19.16	± 6.20	0.58
4.	Object punishment	20.4	± 7.26	21.84	± 7.32	0.99
5.	Demanding	29.5	± 8.23	31.28	± 7.31	1.14
6.	Indifferent	27.3	± 5.42	27.46	± 5.23	0.15
7.	Symbolic reward	35.46	± 7.17	35.8	± 5.56	0.26
8.	Loving	36.98	± 6.79	39.2	± 5.18	1.94*
9.	Object reward	33.18	± 8.22	34.56	± 7.19	0.89
10.	Neglecting	20.8	± 5.42	18.78	± 4.79	1.97**

*, ** and *** indicate significance of values at P<0.10, <0.05 and <0.01, respectively

Table 4 : Differences in mean scores (Mean±SD) of daughters' perceived relationship with parents across various dimensions of parent-child relationship (n=100)

Sr. No.	Dimensions of parent-child relationship	Fathers (n ₁ =50)	Mothers (n ₂ =50)	t-value
		Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	
1.	Protecting	40.9 ± 5.17	42.48 ± 5.30	1.51
2.	Symbolic punishment	26.12 ± 6.41	28.66 ± 6.45	1.98**
3.	Rejecting	18.04 ± 7.23	17.58 ± 7.45	0.31
4.	Object punishment	15.52 ± 6.72	17.12 ± 7.51	1.12
5.	Demanding	25.74 ± 7.72	28.2 ± 7.82	1.58
6.	Indifferent	26.48 ± 4.57	26 ± 4.56	0.53
7.	Symbolic reward	36.8 ± 7.67	37.9 ± 6.96	0.75
8.	Loving	39.02 ± 7.17	41.42 ± 6.32	1.77*
9.	Object reward	34.98 ± 7.57	35.38 ± 7.79	0.26
10.	Neglecting	21.04 ± 5.82	20.02 ± 7.53	0.76

* and ** indicate significance of values at $P < 0.10$ and < 0.05 , respectively

statistically highly significant differences (t -value=3.60; $p < 0.01$) in the protecting behaviour of parents as mothers were perceived more protecting than fathers by sons. The results are corroborated with the findings of the study conducted by Bhaskar and Komal's (2015) who also indicated that mothers were more protective than fathers towards adolescent boys.

The 'protecting behaviour' refers to defending behaviour overtly expressed in the acts of guarding, sheltering and shielding the child from situations or experiences perceived to be hostile, oppressive and harmful. This implies that the sons perceived their mothers to be more concerned, guarding and shielding than fathers. Meraj (1983) in her study also mentioned that upper middle class mothers were warmer and demonstrative and children revealed positive attitude towards their parental treatment. Data in Table 3 also reveals a significant difference in sons' perception with respect to the symbolic punishment and love dimensions (t -value=1.87 and 1.94, respectively; $p < 0.10$) of PCR. Sons expressed that mothers as compared to fathers tended to display their annoyance more through symbolic means but at the same time were more loving towards them. Further, statistically significant difference were also observed in the mean scores of fathers and mothers in the neglecting dimension (t -value=1.97; $p < 0.05$). Sons perceived their fathers as more neglecting in their behaviour than mothers. This might be attributed to the fact that fathers being the bread winners were busier in work whereas mothers were more often available at home for children as emotional cushion and physical support.

Data in Table 4 present daughters' perception of their

relationship with their mother and father. Statistically significant differences in mean scores were observed for mothers and fathers on the dimension of symbolic punishment (t -value=1.98; $p < 0.05$) and love (t -value=1.77; $p < 0.10$). Daughters perceived their mothers punishing them more through symbolic representations as compared to their fathers and found fathers to be more loving towards them. However, similar observations were also found true for their male counterparts (Table 4). For the other dimensions of PCR, daughters perceived mothers and fathers at par.

Conclusion :

Parent-child relationship plays an important role in building the personality of children. Children who share a positive relationship with their parents, have better self esteem, confidence, emotional security and grow upto become effective members of the society. Even though parents wish best for their children, it is essential to explore how children perceive their behaviour. The results highlighted that adolescents perceived that their mothers gave them significantly more punishment through symbolic representations than their fathers did but at the same time were more loving toward them than their fathers. It was also found that sons perceived their mothers more protecting and less neglecting than fathers. Therefore, it can be inferred that sons perceived parents to be more demanding and also they claimed to receive more object punishment from their parents. On the other hand, daughters perceived their fathers to be more protecting and mothers to be more loving and symbolic reward giving as compared to their male counterparts.

The above findings may be useful in effectively dealing with the issues and conflicts between adolescents and their parents and thus improving their mutual understanding. This will in turn help in enhancing positive family dynamics, resulting in better psychological and emotional development of children.

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