

Research Paper

The Relationship between Parent-Child Relationship and Perceived Stress among Adolescents in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has been plagued with the advent of technological advances that has significantly diminished the value of parent-child relationships among adolescents. The present quantitative study examines how parent child relationship affects stress levels among adolescents and was conducted among a young adolescents group with a sample size of 60 individuals. The tools used for conducting the study was Perceived Stress scale, Parent-Child relationship scale and the socio-demographic sheet. A correlational analysis was conducted to analyze the relationship between stress and parent-child relationship along with simple linear regression to explain the relationship. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between stress and parent-child relationship with respect to both, mother and father-child relationships. By establishing parental warmth, care, and affection it is possible to regulate any distress resulting in lower stress for adolescents. The effects of a positive-parent child relationship can also be extended to helping manage academic stress by providing parental support and alleviating concerns of loneliness in managing crisis. Other noteworthy benefits of a positive parent-child relationship are in helping children to build confidence among themselves thereby enabling them to handle potentially demanding future events as well. In light of these findings, it may be argued that the effects of parent-child relationship, explored in the present study have long-term implications for children in general.

Keywords: *Stress, Parent-child relationship, Birth order, Adolescents*

Adolescents are individuals who are aged between 10-19 years. During the child's adolescent period of development parents have a difficult time handling the adolescents push for autonomy. Healthy parent involvement helps the child to exhibit optimistic and confident social behavior which plays a way for better social and academic skills. Every human being's development starts when they enter their puberty between the ages 10-12 years and ends when physiological maturity is attained. A change in sexual characteristics, physical characteristics and sexual interest resulting in significant effects on self-esteem, body image and self-concept takes place during the period of human development. During the adolescence period of development, parents have a difficult time

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handling the adolescent's push for autonomy. Perceived stress is the feelings or thoughts that an individual has about how much stress they are under at a given point in time or over a given time period (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). It consists of critical aspects of stress appraisal such as unpredictability and uncontrollability along with the appraisal of perceptions of stress and an ability to handle stressful situations. The term "parent-child relationship" refers to the unique and significant affiliation between a parent and child. Legally, the parent-child relationship is defined as the relationship between an individual and their biological offspring or between an individual and a child he or she has legally adopted (Mihalec-Adkins, 2020).

Kim and Lee (2013) discuss the reciprocal relationship between the parent adolescent relationship and academic stress. According to the study, parent-adolescent relationship and academic stress predicted stress levels along with pointing out that closer parent-adolescent relationships, indicated a higher intensity of academic stress among adolescents. Findings from another study by Thornton, Orbach and Axinn (1995) makes mention of gender-based socialization among fathers and mothers in their relationship with their children. Other notable findings from the study are reports by children of having a less than favorable relationship with their fathers in comparison to their mothers (Gronvold, 1988) and the prevalence of communication difficulties as reported by the children (nearly 40%) but an overall positive relationship appears to exist between parents and children.

Datta and Guite (2020) reveals important insights into parent-adolescent relationship through their study on parenting styles and parent-adolescent relationships – indicating that effective communication is critical for improving parental relationships with children and higher appraisal of control among adolescent's life is highest for parents engaging in authoritative or indulgent parenting styles. Furthermore, engaging in emotional availability and providing parental support are associated with heightened self-esteem among adolescents (Whitbeck et al., 1991). This may provide greater impetus to effectively appraise and deal with challenging stressors in one's life.

Direct investigation of the relationship between perceived stress and parent-child relationship in an Indian context, among published studies, is scarce to the best of our knowledge. Adolescents' stress can well be regulated with adequate parental involvement and strong relationships with parents. In every aspect of adolescent's life, the various stages of development are important in terms of challenges and stressors conferred, and the role of parents is very crucial during this time without which, adolescents can show vulnerability for various kinds of psychopathological disorders. The cultural factors implicated in the proposed relationship between parent-child relationship and perceived stress has not been studied extensively in other studies, to the best of the author's knowledge. In light of these findings, the present study held the objectives of assessing the relationship between stress and parent child relationship (this includes the mother-child relationship and father child relationship separately). It was hypothesized using the null hypothesis that there will be no relationship between perceived stress and parent-child relationship among adolescents in Kerala.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The sample consist of 60 students aged between 13 to 19 years (Mean age= 16.91 years) from various districts of Kerala. A total of 40 girls (66.7%) and 20 boys (33.3%) participated in the study and in consideration of the participant's age, informed consent was

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obtained from both the study participants as well as their parents. The inclusion criteria chosen were participants residing in Kerala, who have had no previous record of mental or physical illnesses and had a sufficient matriculation level of knowledge of English language. The exclusion criteria were adolescents who were enrolled in schools, or adolescents who did not reside with their parents at the time of their study participation. Non-probability sampling (convenience sampling) was utilized considering time and financial constraints.

Instruments

A sociodemographic datasheet collected relevant details of the participant necessary for the present study consisting of questions about age, gender, area of residence, birth order etc. Parent-child relationship was measured using the Parent-Child Relationship Scale (PCRS) questionnaire developed by Dr. Nalini Rao (1989). It consists of 100 items categorized into 10 dimensions. The test-retest reliability ranged from 0.770 to 0.871 for boys and 0.772 to 0.873 for the girls. Construct validity of the scales was attempted by correlating the data from a sample of ninety-three second year students on the PCR scales with the data obtained on Bronfenbrenner Parent Behavior Questionnaire. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Sheldon Cohen and colleagues was used to measure perceived stress among adolescents consisting of 14 items. It helps to assess the degree of situations being perceived as stressful in an individual's life and has been internationally adapted and validated. Internal consistency reliability using alpha coefficient for PSS was 0.84 among college student population, with a test-retest correlation of 0.85.

Procedure

Digital copies of the questionnaires were sent via Google Forms to the participants. Ethical considerations complied with included: anonymity of responses, data confidentiality, informed consent and voluntary participation as per the Helsinki Guidelines (1964). All items as part of the toolkit were reviewed for containing any questions that were misleading, insensitive or could potentially harm the participant. No such questions were identified. Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS Version 20.0 (IBM). Normality of the data was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality. Pearson's correlation r was conducted for investigating possible associations between the two variables and a simple linear regression was used for estimating the regression line.

RESULTS

Table 1.1 Relationship between perceived stress and father-child relationship among adolescents.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	p
Perceived Stress	60	12.68	5.35	-0.375	0.003**
Father-Child Relationship		237.26	43.73		

*** p significant at 0.001 level (2-tailed)*

Upon indication of normality of data ($p > 0.05$) on the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality, parametric tests were employed for analysis. The sample generally reported an overall lowered level of perceived stress. Furthermore, Pearson's r correlation test was conducted which revealed that perceived stress (Mean = 12.68, SD = 5.35) showed significant weak negative correlation with father child relationship (Mean = 237.26 SD= 43.73) at $r = -0.375$, $p < 0.01$ ($N=60$) as seen in Table 1.1. Meanwhile, stress (Mean = 12.68, SD = 5.35) showed

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significant moderate negative correlation with mother-child relationship (Mean = 258.46 SD= 53.39) at $r = -0.456$, $p < 0.01$, (N=60) indicated in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Relationship between perceived stress and mother-child relationship among adolescents.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	p
Perceived Stress	60	12.68	5.35	-0.456	0.000**
Mother-Child Relationship		258.46	53.39		

***p significant at 0.001 level (2-tailed)*

Through a simple linear regression, it was investigated if the independent variable (parent-child relationship) would predict the dependent variable (perceived stress). Similarly, a significant regression equation was found for mother-child relationship and perceived stress indicated by ($F(1, 58) = 15.265$, $p < 0.01$) with an R^2 of 20.8 (or 20.8% of variance in perceived stress can be explained by mother-child relationship). The participants' predicted perceived stress was equal to -0.046 (mother-child relationship) + 24.505 , as shown within Table 2.2.

Table 2.1 Regression line of father-child relationship and perceived stress among adolescents.

Variable	B	95% CI [Lower bound, Upper bound]	Beta	t	p
CONSTANT	23.558	[16.366, 30.749]	-0.375	6.558	0.000**
Father-Child Relationship	-0.046	[-0.076, -0.016]		-3.077	0.003**

R^2 adjusted = 0.126, CI = confidence interval for B, ***p < 0.01 is considered significant*

A significant regression equation was found as indicated in Table 2.1 for father-child relationship and perceived stress indicated by ($F(1, 58) = 9.469$, $p < 0.01$) with an R^2 of 14 (or 14% of variance in perceived stress can be explained by father-child relationship). The participants' predicted perceived stress was equal to -0.046 (father-child relationship) + 23.558 . A similar regression analysis was conducted for mother-child relationship and perceived stress among adolescents.

Table 2.2 Regression line of mother-child relationship and perceived stress among adolescents.

Variable	B	95% CI [Lower bound, Upper bound]	Beta	t	p
CONSTANT	24.505	[18.323, 30.687]	-0.456	7.934	0.000**
Mother-Child Relationship	-0.046	[-0.069, -0.022]		-3.907	0.000**

R^2 adjusted = 0.195, CI = confidence interval for B, ***p < 0.01 is considered significant*

As shown in Table 2.2, a significant regression equation was found for mother-child relationship and perceived stress as well, indicated by ($F(1, 58) = 15.265$, $p < 0.01$) with an

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R^2 of 20.8 (or 20.8% of variance in perceived stress can be explained by mother-child relationship). The participants' predicted perceived stress was equal to -0.046 (mother-child relationship) + 24.505 .

DISCUSSION

Adolescence is a bridge between the childhood and adulthood a transition phase. The findings of the present study indicate that stress shows a negative association between parent-child relationships among mothers and fathers. The result may indicate that when stress increases, the quality of parent child relationship decreases. In the Indian context, this maybe because mothers are mostly expected to be highly involved in child rearing. After the birth of every child, mothers are expected to embody being an “attachment figure” rather than the father. The child is fully dependent on the mother for the first few years which would most likely create a special bond between them but then, as time goes by through various stages of development, the child maybe under some stressors – academic, personal or even situational and thus, higher perceived stress can take a toll on an individual's relationships with their parents, for the worse. This may be due to inefficiency in managing stress or an inability to effectively engage in activities or time required to build or nurture parent-child relationships.

The impact of adolescent stress on fatherhood is practically significant considering the role of fathers in the Indian household, as the stereotypical ‘breadwinner’ of the family. Fathers usually spend lesser time with children compared to mothers throughout childhood, on an average, and conversely this can impact father-child relationships because it creates greater alienation, strife and discord among children and their relationships with their fathers owing to lack of communication, bonding and involvement. The weak correlation maybe due to other factors influencing the relationship between stress and father-child relationships which may be explored in further studies. Furthermore, it maybe postulated that dysfunctional parent child relationships, in turn affects the levels of perceived stress in a repetitive, negative self-perpetuating cycle and these findings are supported by results from Thornton, Orbuch and Axxin (1995).

A possible predictor of poorer parent-child relationships maybe academic-specific stressors in the child's life. The Indian household and family structure are intricately tied to societal pressures on Indian adolescents to perform well academically, and this may have led to poorer outcomes in quality relationships with one's parents. Sharma & Jagdev (2012), found that students with a high academic stress may have a low self-esteem. This indicates the implicit societal expectation to procure outstanding grades in India which maybe a causative factor in developing stress. Even though stress levels in the present sample are lesser than expected, it may manifest. Having poor or unstable parent-child relationships can constrict academic development and performance leading to inevitable stress (Kim & Lee, 2013). The results from McCarthy, Mouller and Fouladi (2001) also support this inverse relationship between quality parent-child relationship, especially with one's mother as a predictor of lower perceived stress among adolescents and greater confidence to handle stressors. An unhealthy parent-child relationship can create frictions and conflicts between the two parties which, in turn, develops stressful conditions. Thus, a healthy parent-child relationship will always make things better for children by helping to build more confident, and positive individuals.

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The findings of this study must be viewed in light of certain limitations. Firstly, the small sample size may have constricted the generalizability of results and thus future researches may be advised to use larger and more geographically-diverse samples. Secondly, female participants outnumbered male participants which may have led to unintentional biased responses. Self-report inventories also carry certain limitations by themselves as social desirability biases, linguistic restrictions etc. Stress can impact family dynamics leading to possible dysfunction amidst family members, especially parents and parental relationships as the study suggests plays a role in managing stressful conditions. This maybe a contribution for family therapy and stress interventions among adolescents in clinical and educational settings.

CONCLUSION

In light of the present findings, the contributions made to understanding the role of parent-child relationship in increasing perceived stress are relevant and far-reaching given the pandemic's impact on various spheres of education including the expansion of online learning that poses significant stressors in the form of communication among teachers and parents, teachers and students and finally, how adolescents utilize friend support and building relationships with one's peers. The present study concludes that there exists a relationship between parent-child relationship and perceived stress among adolescents.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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