
Research Papers



A STUDY OF PARENTAL PERCEPTION OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

Teenage is considered as a period of stress and storm. Family relationships at this particular stage of life become very sensitive and vulnerable. Family atmosphere is very important factor, which contributes to the parent – teen relationship. Family atmosphere may be characterized by the relationships that already exists in it and moreover by status of each family member specially the parents. It has been observed that these family relationships are different for sons and daughters. The parents act in a gender specific manner and the boys and girls are treated differently which leads to development of different self concepts and behaviours of boys and girls (Hoffman and Kloska 1995). Several studies have also shown that children and parents have overlapping but discrete perceptions of their relationships or of each other's behaviour (Demo et al 1987; Noller and Callan 1988).

INTRODUCTION

From developmental point of view, parent-child agreement can be seen as one of the variables that characterize effective parenting. As Schaefer and Keith (1985), among others, have shown, people's thoughts and actions are often based on their definition of a situation. Similarly, children are influenced by their perceptions of parental attitudes and behaviours or those reported by their parents (Demo et al 1987). Some recent studies have suggested that children's descriptions of their mothers' and fathers' parenting behaviors overlap considerably. Although little research has examined this issue, there is evidence that children may attribute the characteristics of one parent, possibly the dominant parent in the child's mind, to both parents i.e. when an adolescent rated a mother as authoritarian, the father was likely to be rated the same (Bartle et al 1989). Children themselves are different. They can be of different ages and genders and have varying interests, needs and behaviors. These dissimilarities make differential treatment appropriate on some occasions. When parents treat children differently, the parent-child relationship quality

appears to be much more affected by the child's perception of whether the treatment was fair rather than the parent's opinion.

Children's symptomatology affects their perceptions of parental behaviors. Delinquents and maladjusted children have a less favorable picture of parents. They tend to perceive parents as rejecting, punitive, lax in discipline, low in psychological control, and excessively demanding (Cox 1970). Similarly, depressed mothers have more negative perceptions of their children's behaviours than non-depressed mothers.

Understanding parents' perspectives is critical as mothers and fathers are likely to view their child-rearing behaviors, along with their motivation and goals for these behaviors, in ways that differ substantially from their children. The determining factor in an individual's reaction to his environment is his attitudes and behaviour, which depend on his response to "his" perception of his family. It is in this context that several researches emphasize that it is inappropriate to elicit information about one's perception of his family or his parent as a unit. An

individual may very well have quite different feelings and attitudes regarding each member of the family.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The nuclear families where both parents were at least graduate and were working and had one teenage son and teenage daughter were purposively selected from four zones of Ludhiana city. The total sample comprised of 100 fathers and 100 mothers. A self designed socio-demographic questionnaire was used to identify families that fulfilled the inclusion criteria set for the present study. Parent child relationship scale by Chauhan and Sharma (2002) was used to assess the quality of parent child relationship as perceived by parents. The scale studies relationship on eight dichotomous dimensions of parenting

1. Rejection v/s Acceptance:
2. Carelessness v/s Over-protection
3. Negligence v/s Over-indulgence
4. Strong-realism v/s U t o p i a n -expectation
5. Lenient Standards v/s Severe moralism
6. Total freedom v/s Severe discipline
7. Marital conflict v/s Marital adjustment
8. Faulty role expectation v/s Realistic role expectation

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Table 1. displays distribution of fathers and mothers across eight dimensions of parent-child relationship. Each dimension was assigned a level based on mean scores of that particular dimension.

Fathers' Perception: A close look at that table clearly indicates that majority of fathers (65%) showed highly accepting behaviour for both sons and daughters, however very few (7-4%) had shown rejecting behaviour. It further depicts that 47 percent of fathers were over protective for their daughters and 45 percent showed moderate level of protecting behaviour for sons. Again, majority of fathers believed in moderate level of indulgence both in case of sons (51%) and daughters (56%). As compared for daughters, 22 percent of fathers were found over indulging for their sons i.e. they accepted the demands of their sons more than their daughters and they failed to exercise needed constraint on their sons. This table further depicts that fathers had utopian expectations from their teenaged sons (44%) and daughters (46%). It showed that fathers demand higher quality of performance and imaginary perfections from their children. The percentage for moderate level of expectations was found more for sons (40%) than for daughters (35%) that indicated that unrealistic and higher quality performance was expected more from daughters than from sons. On dimension of severe moralism, majority of fathers believed in severe moralism for their sons (41%) and daughters (40%). This indicated that fathers wanted that their teenagers must learn moral values and should satisfy their superego by abiding the rules of society. In contrast to this, majority of fathers believed

in moderate level of discipline for their sons (48%) and daughters (46%). Only negligible number i.e. 2 per cent of fathers for sons and 3 per cent of fathers for daughters believed in giving total freedom to their teenagers. Fathers also revealed good impact of their marital relationship on their sons (57%) and daughters (58%). Fathers reported that they provide congenial home atmosphere to their teenage sons and daughters. Majority of fathers also displayed realistic role expectations for their sons (84%) and daughters (83%) showing that they have consistence in their thoughts and actions being inspiring model for their teenagers.

Table 1 Percentage distribution of parents across various levels of dimensions of PCR.

Sr. No.	Dimension	Level of dimension	Fathers' perception		Mothers' perception	
			Son (n=100)	Daughter (n=100)	Son (n=100)	Daughter (n=100)
1.	Rejection	High	2	2	1	1
		Moderate	7	4	7	6
	Acceptance	High	65	65	71	71
		Moderate	26	29	21	22
2.	Carelessness	High	3	1	2	2
		Moderate	12	14	13	15
	Overprotection	High	40	47	48	55
		Moderate	45	38	37	28
3.	Negligence	High	4	4	3	2
		Moderate	19	18	31	30
	Overindulgence	High	26	22	29	27
		Moderate	51	56	37	41
4.	Strong realism	High	5	6	2	2
		Moderate	11	13	11	11
	Utopian expectation	High	44	46	46	34
		Moderate	40	35	41	53
5.	Lenient standards	High	2	3	1	3
		Moderate	25	23	21	19
	Severe moralism	High	41	40	38	40
		Moderate	32	34	40	38
6.	Total freedom	High	2	3	3	3
		Moderate	20	19	29	25
	Severe discipline	High	30	32	27	32
		Moderate	48	46	41	40
7.	Marital conflict	High	3	4	-	-
		Moderate	14	15	14	14
	Marital adjustment	High	57	58	63	63
		Moderate	56	23	23	23

2. Mothers' Perception: Table also displays per cent distribution of mothers across eight dimensions of parent-child relationship. Alike fathers, majority of mothers were also found high on acceptance dimension both in case of sons (71%) and daughters (71%). Mothers reported positive attitude towards their teenagers and showed acceptance for their ideas and judgement. They were found to be loving, affectionate and had attentive behaviour towards needs of their teenage son and daughter. Unlike fathers, majority of mothers showed over protective behaviour for son (48%) and daughter (55%). Mothers were found over-protective for daughters as compared to sons. This table further depicts that 37 per cent of mothers showed moderate level of indulging behaviour for sons as compared to 41 per cent of mothers who showed moderate indulgence for their daughters. More mothers reported concern for their daughters than for

sons. It is interesting to note that 31 per cent of the mothers also reported moderate level of negligence for their sons against 30 per cent of mothers who reported moderate negligence for their daughters. It indicates that mothers showed a balanced combination of indulging and neglecting behaviour. Though mothers were concerned about and fulfilled daily demands of their teenagers yet at times they also became uncooperative and inattentive to unrealistic demands of their teenagers. Similar to fathers, majority of mothers also expected high quality performance from their teenage sons (46%) and daughters (53%). Higher and unrealistic expectations were more from daughters than from sons. Perceptual differences were found in case of severe moralism. Forty per cent of mothers reported that sons need to follow moderate level of moralism against forty per cent of mothers who reported that daughters must follow rules of severe moralism i.e. mothers showed slightly values than sons.

Looking at severe discipline/total freedom, 41 per cent of mothers reported moderate level of discipline for sons. On the other hand, 40 per cent of mothers also reported moderate level of discipline for daughters followed by 32 per cent of mothers who reported severe discipline for their daughters. Against this, only 27 per cent of mothers reported need for severe discipline discriminating concern by putting more pressure on daughters to follow moral for sons. It may be concluded that mothers favoured sons by giving them more freedom and by allowing them to take independent decisions while keeping daughters under strict control and discipline. They were reluctant to allow their daughters to take independent decisions.

Good marital adjustment, mutual understanding and congenial home environment were reported by 63 per cent of the mothers. Majority of mothers both in case of sons and daughters reported positive impact of their good marital relation on teenagers. In contrast to this, none of the mothers supported ill effects of their marital conflict on their teenage sons and daughters. 79 per cent of mothers for sons and 78 per cent of mothers for daughters reported emotional stability and consistency in their behaviour which made them an effective and inspiring model for their teenagers to follow.

CONCLUSION: It could be from the above discussion that

- Majority of fathers and mothers were found high on acceptance dimension and they reported positive attitude towards their teenagers and showed acceptance for their ideas and judgement.

- Majority of fathers believed in moderate level of discipline for their sons (48%) and daughters however, mothers favoured sons by giving them more freedom and by allowing them to take independent decisions while keeping daughters under strict control and discipline.

- Fathers demanded higher quality of

performance and imaginary perfections from their children. The unrealistic and higher quality performance was expected more from daughters than from sons.

- Mothers were found more over-protective for daughters than for sons.

RECOMMENDATION: It is important to understand that parent's perception of their relationship with their children plays a pivotal role in determining quality of their family relationships. Parent education programmes need to be organized to sensitize parents to regard their sons and daughters as equals on all the dimensions of parenting to maintain healthy relationships.

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