

Impact of Mother, Father and Peer Attachment on Coping of Young Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

In the study of Life span approach the concept of Parental and Peer Attachment has time and again been found as significant and relevant to be discussed in case of adolescents. Thus, the present study aimed to examine the impact of Maternal, Paternal & Peer Attachment separately on different domains of coping of young adolescents. The sample of the study consisted of 100 young adolescent volunteers (i.e. 50 boys and 50 girls) with age ranging from 13-14 years. To carry out the study the adolescents completed Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) and Coping Checklist. Results indicated that adolescents who showed high maternal and paternal and peer attachment used more problem- focused coping and social- support coping and less emotion- focused coping than their low attachment counterparts.

Keywords: Attachment, Adolescence, Coping.

In the study of life span approach the concept of Attachment has been studied extensively due to its importance not only in early years of life but also how it leaves its traces during the critical phase of adolescence. At first, the concept of Attachment was defined by Bowlby (1973, 1982) as the strong affective bond between the infant and the primary caregiver. Later on Ainsworth (1989) also described it as a deep, enduring, affective bond between two persons. It was further assumed through the concept of Secure-base hypothesis, that the presence of such bonds often act as a secure base that instills confidence and trust in the child which often helps them to explore & deal with the challenges of the outside world without experiencing much anxiety. In short, strong parent-child bond gives emotional support to the children which often help them in reducing distress during difficult situations across the life span.

Apart from secure-base hypothesis the concept of **Internal working model** also require some mentioning here, which suggests that through interaction with the available attachment figure

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children often constructs a mental picture regarding their self and the outside world which often influence their perception, expectation and planning regarding how they should behave in future (Bowlby 1969, 1973) and once formed these models often tend to remain stable across time. Moreover these internal working models can be positive or negative depending upon the availability and responsiveness of the attachment figure which further influences children's perception of themselves as competent and worthwhile individuals in future (Cassidy 2000). Thus, it can be said that parental attachment has been found to exert its influence not only during infancy or childhood but also during the transitional phase of adolescence (Ainsworth, 1989; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Kenny, 1987; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Rice, 1990; Ryan & Lynch, 1989).

Apart from parents, Attachment theory is also applicable to children's relationship with peers. Particularly during adolescent phase, individuals begin to spend increasing amount of time with their peers instead of parents. As a result their intimacy reaches its peak during this time (Berndt, 2002; Collins & Laursen, 2000). Moreover peers often become sources of emotional and social support (Wilkinson, 2004) to adolescents and studies often suggests that strong peer attachment promote healthy adjustment (Robinson 2002) and moral development (Piaget, 1965) too.

Considering all these evidences it becomes clear that attachment (both parental and peer) is an important psychological construct that might have a strong link with various psychological indices and attachment theory has particularly interesting applications for understanding adolescent development.

Thus, the present study attempts to investigate whether Parental attachment (Mother attachment and Father attachment separately) and Peer attachment have any impact on three domains of coping (namely problem- focused, emotion-focused and social support coping) of early adolescence. Growing research in the field of attachment that takes attempt to link this psychological construct with coping motivated the researcher to include this variable in the present study.

According to Folkman & Lazarus (1985) coping is the cognitive and the behavioral attempts to manage stress. There are various types or styles of coping that people commonly use such as Problem-focused coping and Emotion-focused coping and Social support coping. In Problem focused coping people try to solve the problem directly often through information gathering, planning or developing new skills. While Emotion- focused coping "is oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress." (Bannon & Fiest 2009). Here people use various techniques such as avoidance, denial, acceptance, blaming, acting out etc to minimize the stressors involved in a problem situation. Social support coping is a strategy in which people seek support from others to solve the problem and it is often the combination of problem focused and emotion focused coping strategy.

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Regarding the research about Parental attachment and Coping, researchers (for e.g. Armsden, McCauly, Greenberg, Burke and Mitchell 1990) suggested that insecure parental attachment often lead adolescents to develop poor coping. The reason for this may be attributed to the fact that insecure attachment often prevents the adolescents to develop enough confidence and self esteem which often restricts them to explore the environment and thus resulting them to develop maladaptive ways of coping .Whereas secure attachment often lead individuals to seek support from others during the turbulent phase of adolescence (Kenny et al (1993).

Few recent studies also dealt with the same issue. One such study was conducted by Howard et al (2004) to find out how high school students cope with stress as a function of their attachment style. Results of the study revealed that attachment security was positively related to family communication and negatively related to avoidance behavior whereas insecure attachment was positively related to negative avoidance.

Another study done by Melissa (2007) aimed to investigate the relationship between parental attachment security and coping on high school students, also indicated that adolescents who reported high parental attachment were less likely to use avoidant coping strategies than their low attachment counterparts.

Apart from studies regarding parental attachment, few studies have also been done regarding peer attachment and coping. In one such study done by Khazaie et al (2015) an attempt has been made to evaluate the relationship between peer attachment and coping styles among adolescents. The study was conducted on 302 high school students in Iran among whom 199 were male and 103 were female. Results revealed that Peer attachment were significant predictors of adolescents' coping styles. More specifically, mean score of the problem focused coping style was significantly higher than the other coping styles.

Thus from the above studies it can be deciphered that the field of Attachment is worthy enough for future study and scarcity of research in the field of mother and father attachment separately (instead of parental attachment in combined form) on adolescents' coping motivated the researcher to investigate this issue that can make one's cognition more enriched.

Objectives

- To determine the impact of Mother, Father and Peer Attachment on Coping of young adolescents.

Hypotheses

1. There will be no effect of Mother Attachment on three domains of Coping namely, Problem-focused coping, Emotion- focused coping and Social support of young adolescents.

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2. There will be no effect of Father Attachment on three domains of Coping namely, Problem-focused coping, Emotion- focused coping and Social support of young adolescents.
3. There will be no effect of Peer Attachment on three domains of Coping namely, Problem-focused coping, Emotion- focused coping and Social support of young adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample of this study initially consisted of altogether 100 young adolescent volunteers (i.e.50 boys and 50 girls) with age ranging from 13-14 years. All respondents were students of class (viii) in two schools (one for boys and one for girls) of Kolkata, West Bengal.

Exclusion Criteria

Those subjects were excluded from the study who had any sort of serious physical illness and any sort of psychiatric illness, any kind of disability and any sort of parental deprivation i.e. those subjects were excluded who are Orphan or institutionalized due to their parent's death or separated from their parents due to any other social reasons, viz, divorce, separation, & others.

Instruments Used

The following tools were used in the present study for different purposes.

1. Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) - Developed by Gay Armsden and Mark T. Greenberg (1987) this tool was used to assess adolescents' perceived attachment toward their parents and peers. This inventory includes three separate scales for measuring Mother attachment, Father attachment and Peer attachment.
2. Coping Checklist(CCL-1)- Developed by Kiran Rao, D.K. Subbakrishna &G.G. Prabhu (1989) this scale was used to assess the coping strategies of adolescents. This scale includes seven subscales which involve one problem focused scale, five emotion focused scale & the last one is social support which is a combination of both problem & emotion focused coping.

Procedure

To conduct the study first consent was taken from the respective schools from where adolescent volunteers were taken for data collection. Only those subjects were taken who fulfilled the inclusion criteria for the respective samples.

Rapport was established with each subject & preliminary information regarding their age, socio-economic status, education, parents & parental income & their occupation was recorded through an information schedule. Then each selected subjects were approached individually.

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Data collection was started with IPPA followed by Coping Checklist. This same sequence was followed for each subject. Equal amount of rest was given to all subjects between the administrations of each tool. While administering each test standard method of administration was followed. After collecting the data, the responses were scored according to the scoring standard and necessary statistical calculations were done to meet the objectives. The data were analyzed by descriptive statistics as well as inferential statistics. For these analyses, a **categorical attachment variable** was generated by **creating two groups** (e.g. those adolescents falling lower than the Q1 of the mother attachment score were placed in the low maternal attachment group and those falling higher than the Q3 of the mother attachment score were placed in the high maternal attachment group) such that a **low and high attachment group** was created for each of the three attachment figures (i.e., mother, father and peer). In this way, adolescents received a low or high classification based on their scores on each of the attachment measures. Thus the N became 40 (20 for High Attachment & 20 for Low Attachment Group) for mother, father & peer attachment.

Attachment Score Range for Assignment to Categorical Groups

	Low Group Range	High Group Range
Mother Attachment	≤ 83	≥ 95
Father Attachment	≤ 79	≥ 94
Peer Attachment	≤ 80	≥ 90

RESULTS

Table 1: Showing the Means, S.D.s and 't' ratios of Mother Attachment scores of two subgroups of Early Adolescents for each dependent variable measures.

Dependent Variables	High Attachment		Low Attachment		t-statistic	Level of Significance
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Pb Cope	7.40	1.69	5.90	1.55	2.91 **	0.01
Emo Cope	19.15	3.91	23.70	4.69	-3.33**	0.01
Social Support	4.05	1.31	2.95	1.39	2.56**	0.01

From the obtained result and statistical analysis (Mean and S.D. values) it becomes evident that those adolescents who showed high maternal attachment used more problem-focused coping and social support coping and less emotion-focused coping than their low attachment counterparts. As far as t-statistic is concerned, significant t value for all three domains of Coping in case of Mother Attachment indicates there is a significant impact of Mother Attachment on three domains of coping of young adolescents. Hence, the null hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Table 2: Showing the Mean, S.D.s and ‘t’ ratios of Father Attachment scores of two subgroups of Early adolescents for each dependent variable measures.

Dependent Variables	High Attachment		Low Attachment		t-statistic	Level of Significance
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Pb Cope	7.60	1.60	4.85	1.59	5.43**	0.01
Emo Cope	20.80	2.56	23.40	1.90	-3.62 **	0.01
Social Support	4.55	0.99	2.65	1.26	5.26**	0.01

Results (Mean values) regarding father attachment of Early Adolescent group also showed quite similar result which indicates that adolescents who showed high paternal attachment used more problem focused coping and social support coping and less emotion-focused coping than their low attachment counterparts. As far as t-statistic is concerned, significant t value for all three domains of Coping in case of Father Attachment indicates there is a significant impact of Father Attachment on three domains of coping of young adolescents. Hence, the null hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Table 3: Showing the Mean, S.D.s and ‘t’ ratios of Peer Attachment scores of two subgroups of Early adolescents for each dependent variable measures.

Dependent Variables	High Attachment		Low Attachment		T-Statistic	Level Of Significance
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Pb Cope	7.70	1.45	4.85	1.42	6.26**	0.01
Emo Cope	21.30	2.97	24.20	4.03	-2.58**	0.01
Social Support	4.20	1.23	2.80	1.32	3.45**	0.01

Results (Mean values) regarding peer attachment of Early Adolescent group also showed quite similar result which indicates that adolescents who showed high peer attachment used more problem focused coping and social support coping and less emotion-focused coping than their low attachment counterparts. As far as t-statistic is concerned, significant t value for all three domains of Coping in case of Peer Attachment indicates there is a significant impact of Peer Attachment on three domains of coping of young adolescents. Hence, the null hypothesis 3 is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The overall findings of present study is quite in line with the past literature which indicates the point that both maternal and paternal attachment have significant impact on early adolescents’ problem focused, social support and emotion focused coping. Moreover, the obtained result also indicates that adolescents who exhibited higher maternal and paternal attachment used more problem-focused and social support coping than their low attachment counterparts. These findings thus support the point of Sroufe & Waters 1997 which suggested that attachments are enduring bonds that instills both concurrent coping skills and adjustment in future situations.

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Now, if the obtained result is analyzed variable wise then it becomes evident that, as far as the impact of maternal attachment on different dimensions of coping is concerned the result indicates (See Table-1) that those adolescents who showed high maternal attachment were more prone to use problem-focused and less likely to use emotion- focused coping than their low attachment counterparts. Thus the present study findings revealed that, instead of accepting the stressors, involved in a problem situation or denying it or blaming others for it or engaging in impulsive acting out, highly attached (both maternal and paternal) adolescents were more likely to take specific actions or making plans to take such actions or take attempts to manipulate or alter the environment i.e. in short they prefer to take direct actions rather than thinking which is an indicator of problem-focused coping than their low attachment counterparts. This finding support the previous studies which reported the fact that highly attached adolescents were more likely to plan about how to cope with their problems constructively than their low attached counterparts (Lazarus 1993,cited in Alumran & Punamaki, 2008) and adolescents with high parental attachment were less likely to use avoidant coping strategies.(Mandl, Melissa C. 2007).

Results regarding the impact of maternal attachment on social support coping (See table 1) revealed that adolescents in the high attachment group were more likely to use social support coping than their low attachment counterparts. This finding is supported by the previous literature which reported that having more responsive mothers help the child to become more secure in seeking social support from others. In contrast, the low attached adolescents did not develop expectancy and competency to ask for help from others because of probably difficulty in the past to derive support from the caregivers (Rice et al., 1990).

As far as the impact of father attachment on coping is concerned (See Table 2) the obtained result indicates that in comparison to low attached adolescents high attachment group used more problem-focused and social- support coping. This finding is again in line with the above-mentioned studies which were aimed to determine the impact of parental attachment as a whole but it is also worth mentioning that scarcity of research in the field of Father Attachment separately does not enable the researcher to validate this finding more elaborately.

Regarding the impact of Peer attachment on coping the result table (See Table 3) indicates that in comparison to low attachment group, high attachment group used more problem-focused and social- support coping. This finding is supported by Armsden's (1986) study which suggested that peer attachment is associated with the use of more problem- solving coping strategies relative to emotion- managing efforts in stressful situations.

Thus considering the theoretical framework of attachment theory and findings of the present study it may be deciphered that having a strong attachment bond with both parental figure and peer group might act as a buffer or protective factor that may help the adolescents to maintain their psychological well-being and enable them to function in a more constructive manner in difficult and unpredictable situations of adolescent phase and this insight and

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knowledge gathered from the present study can be utilized through various intervention or prevention programs that deal with many problems of adolescents at school level.

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