

Role of Parents in the Social Development of Adolescents: A Comparison of Low and Middle Socio-Economic Status

Neeru Sharma and Sumati Vaid

*P.G. Department of Home Science, University of Jammu, Jammu 180 006,
Jammu and Kashmir, India*

KEYWORDS Parental Approval. Emotional Maturity. Self-Actualization. Development Niche

ABSTRACT The present research is an exploratory attempt to study the "Role of parents in the social development of adolescents: A comparison of low and middle socio-economic status". The sample consisted of 100 adolescents and their parents. Random sampling technique was employed to select the middle socio-economic group and snowball sampling technique was used to select low socio-economic status. Three scales were used—Measure of Approving Parent (MAP) for parents, and Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS) and Self Actualization Inventory (SEAI) for adolescent children. Statistical analysis shows that the majority of parents show a moderate degree of approval towards their children. Most of the adolescents of both the group were emotionally unstable and had attained moderate self-actualization. Data was also analyzed through coefficient of correlation and it was found that parental approval does not correlate highly with emotional maturity or self-actualization.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence marks a quest for self-identity and parents play an important role in shaping this identity. The 'Development Niche' of the adolescent is shaped by 1) *the psychology of the care takers*, 2) *the physical and social settings of the child*, and 3) *the child rearing practices of the particular community* (Harkness and Super, 1990). Defined in this mode the socialization practices of Indian parents are shaped by the Hindu Ideology. Adolescence is not seen as a distinct stage and hence the needs of the adolescence are not given much importance over and above their childhood needs. The period from birth to 25 years-of-age is called '*Bramhacharya*' when an individual has to surrender his life, senses, mind and intellect to the '*Guru*' (teacher) for molding and handling. The child on his way to becoming an adult learns the tasks of adulthood and forms an identity for himself. Adolescent crisis, much evident in Western thought and literature, is not evident in the Hindu theories of development predominantly guiding the Indian psyche. Adolescent, as a distinct stage, does not find any mention in these theories, but the western models have guided the research in child development in last 50 years and theories and hence adolescent crisis is much evident or is made to become evident. In a study conducted by Sharma (1999) on

Parental beliefs of 'Dogra' parents (residents of Jammu province of Jammu and Kashmir state of India), it was found that adolescents tend to accept parental authority because they think that parents know the best due to their life experiences. The adolescents and parental beliefs about education, vocation and marriage coincided. Many differences were not observed. The study of beliefs was restricted to the low and middle socio-economic stratum, very high socio-economic strata was not included. The children have over the years have learnt what their parents expect from them. Individuality is not a part of parental expectations; responsibility goals and qualities are given much importance by all the parents with an underlying wish for conformity. The parental practices discourage individualistic or egocentric attitudes, as joint family reins the thought processes. Disregarding the conflict-conflict approach adopted by the western theorists, Montemayor (1983) observed that understanding causes and consequences of conflict with parents may be particularly important during adolescent period for two reasons, a) some conflicts are a part of normal family relations, essential for the transformation of relations with parents that occur during puberty, and b) the other type of conflict, which is serious in nature and is also associated with serious adolescent problem behaviors has its origins in earlier parent child relations.

Parent child relationship does affect adolescent behavior. Lau and Leung (1992) reaffirm

Address for correspondence: Sumati Vaid, Q.No. 96, Resham Ghar Colony, Jammu 180 001, Jammu and Kashmir, India

from their research on family influences that parent-child relationship is a central factor in children's social development. Reporting a non-western study Cheung and Lau (1985) say that a good relationship with parents is associated most noticeably with higher self esteem in Chinese adolescents. Though Aquilino's (1994) focus was young adults, yet his findings on the consequences of parent-child relations are of importance to present research. He derived that parent-child relationship is of central importance to the psychological and material well being of young adults. Hence though the conflict is there, its manifestations are healthy and important for self-development of the adolescent. Wenk et al. (1994) while studying the longitudinal data from the National Survey of Children tried to examine the influence of mother and father's involvement during childhood and adolescence on the well being of these ones and daughters. Three independent measures of well-being self-esteem, life satisfaction and mental health were analyzed. It was found that children's perceptions of their relationships with the mother and father seem to be more salient in the determining how children felt about themselves and their lives. Studying Dutch parent-youth bonds Van Wel (1994) concludes that they generally have positive-egalitarian intergenerational relations. Young et al (1995) too report that parent child relations are strongest predictors of life-satisfaction in adolescent offspring. They found adolescents perceptions of parental support, particularly intrinsic support (encouragement, appreciation, trust, love etc.), to be positively correlated to the life satisfaction measure. Lamborn, Mounts, Dornbusch, and Steinberg (1991) findings indicate that young people benefit most from authoritative parenting and least from authoritarian and permissive parenting. Adolescents who come from homes characterized as authoritative are better adjusted and more competent, they are confident about their abilities, competent in the areas of achievements and less likely to get into trouble. In contrast adolescents coming from authoritarian homes score reasonably well on measures indexing obedience and conformity to the standards of adults but have relatively poorer self-conception than other youngsters. Eccles, Jacquelynne, Buchanan, Christy, Miller, Flanagan, Constance, Fuligni, Andrew, Midgley, and Doris (1991) findings indicate that adolescents desire a

gradual increase in the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives and excessive parental control is linked to more negative changes in self-esteem. Hence the role of parents in the social development of adolescents is of paramount importance.

Adolescence was not seen as a distinct stage. It is only in the western theories that adolescence has been given so much importance as a distinct stage. Childhood ends at puberty with the attainment of sexual maturity. Hindu social system divides the life span into four distinct periods starting from *Bramhacharya* (celibacy 0-25 years), *Grihastha* (householder 25-50 years), *Sanyasa* (detachment 50-75 years approximately) and finally *Vanaprastha* (75 years and above). The scheme of development envisages attainment of '*Moksha*' (freedom from the process of life and death) or '*Nirvana*' from the cycle of birth and rebirth. The '*Bramhacharya*' too marks the attainment of development tasks, which befit the householder but adulthood is a bit delayed process. With the advent of foreign models of development and education, the adolescents in India too are facing the same types of crisis as their western counter parts, but adolescent crisis is not a common happening. There is a need to understand the adolescents in context of the family especially the parents with in the Indian culture. The present paper focuses on the role of parents in social development of adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The sample for the study consists of adolescents and their parents belonging to middle and low socio-economic strata, residing in urban areas of Jammu (winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir State of India). Adolescents and youth in the age group of 12-22 years were included in the sample.

Sample Size: For selecting the sample one hundred urban families having an adolescent in the age group of 12-22 years were selected. The total sample for the present research was 200 (100 adolescents and 100 parents), belonging to the low and middle socio economic status families. For determining the socio-economic status education, occupation and dwelling were the main criteria.

Sampling Techniques: Random sampling technique was employed for the middle socio-

economic status parents and adolescents. For the low socio-economic status parents and adolescents, the investigator approached the maid working in their households. Further they gave information regarding other maids working in an around the locality and about other families living near the houses. These families included not only maids, but people engaged in other occupations like gardener, laborer, hawkers, washer-men, watchmen and sweepers (falling in low socio-economic status).

Tools Used For Data Collection:

- 1) *Scale for Adolescents:* Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS) by Singh, Y. and Bhargava, M. (1990) and Self-Actualization Inventory (SEAI) by Sharma, K. M. (1987).
- 2) *Scale for Parents:* Measure of Approving Parents by Ambast, R. and Tripathi, N.K.M (1980)

Data Collection: Rapport was established by contacting each family individually. Firstly they were asked general information about their family and home. They were motivated and all their doubts regarding the study were removed. After that these three scales were administered on each family. Self-Actualization Inventory and Emotional maturity scale were administered on adolescents. Measure of Approving Parents was administered on one parent, either father or mother. They were given general instruction for the administration of the scale. Literate sample were able to complete the form on their own while the investigator had to help the illiterate sample by reading out the statements and then ticking the right response.

Data Analysis: The responses obtained were coded, tabulated and then percentages were drawn and analyzed. Statistical analysis was used to study the relationship between: *Parenting and Self-Actualization Inventory; Parenting and Emotional maturity scale and Self-Actualization Inventory and Emotional maturity scale.* For this means, standard deviation, correlation coefficients, chi-square, T-test were calculated to facilitate comparison.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 reveals that the median age of parents belonging to low and middle Socio-economic status was 40 years whereas the median age of the adolescents of both the strata were 16 years. Median educational qualification of low Socio-

economic status parents was illiterate whereas median educational qualification of parents belonging to middle socio-economic status was graduation. Median educational qualification of low socio-economic adolescents was primary whereas the median educational qualification of adolescents belonging to middle socio-economic status was graduation. Result reveals that occupation of the parents in the low Socio-economic status were maids, gardeners, laborers, hawkers, washermen, watchmen and sweepers and in the middle Socio-economic status teachers, employees etc. were included in the sample.

Table 1: Background information of the parents and adolescents

Age in years	Median	
	Low SES	Middle SES
Age of the parents	40 years	40 years
Age of the Adolescents	16 years	16 years
<i>Educational Qualification</i>		
Educational qualification of the parents	Illiterate	Graduation
Educational qualification of the Adolescents	Primary	Graduation

Table 2 indicates that most of the parents show a moderate degree of approval (n=84), none of the parents show very high or very low degree of approval. Chi-square indicates that there is no significant difference in the parental approval between two different strata at .005. Most of the children (40%) in the low-income group show extreme emotional stability, whereas those in the middle-income group fall mostly in the categories of unstable to extremely unstable. Chi-square shows that there is difference between the emotional maturity of adolescents in the two socio-economic strata at .01 level of significance. The self-actualization scores reveal that the majority of the adolescents belonging to the both strata are falling in the category of moderate self-actualization level (n=52). Chi-square revealed that there is significant difference among these two strata group in the self-actualization at .005 level of significance.

In Table 3 the correlation values reveal that parental approval does not correlate highly with emotional maturity. There is little if any correlation among these variables. The findings are consistent for both the strata. In the low socio-economic status category most of the subscales

Table 2: Parental approval, emotional maturity and self-actualization

Levels	Parental Approval					χ^2
	Low		Middle		Total	
	n=50	%age	n=50	%age	n=100	
High	9	18	3	6	12	4.2*
Moderate	40	80	44	88	84	
Low	1	2	3	6	4	
<i>Emotional Maturity</i>						
Extremely Stable	20	40	11	22	31	11.94*
Moderate Stable	16	32	9	18	25	
Unstable	10	20	15	30	45	
Extremely Unstable	4	8	15	30	19	
<i>Self-Actualization</i>						
High Actualization	11	22	5	10	16	5.98*
Moderate Actualization	29	58	23	46	52	
Low Actualization	10	20	22	44	32	

*significant difference at .005 level of significance

.. significant difference at .01 level of significance

Table 3: Correlation coefficients between the various measures used

MAPEMS	Parental Approval		Approval		Disapproval		SEAI	
	Low SES	Middle SES	Low SES	Middle SES	Low SES	Middle SES	Low SES	Middle SES
1) <i>Emotional Maturity</i>	-0.13	-0.21	-0.21	0.03	-0.02	0.24	-0.27	0.01
a) Emotional Unstability	-0.07	-0.01	-0.16	0.05	-0.03	0.03	*-0.29	0.07
b) Emotional Regression	-0.09	***-0.26	-0.21	0.08	0.03	0.34	*-0.30	0.13
c) Social Maladjustment	-0.11	-0.19	-0.21	0.3	0.01	0.24	-0.21	-0.03
d) Parental Disapproval	-0.17	-0.15	-0.15	0.05	0.1	0.18	*-0.30	-10
e) Lack of Independence	0.02	-0.14	0.04	*0.27	0.01	0.07	0.08	0.05
2) SEAI	0.06	-0.02	0.15	**0.29	-0.03	***-0.24	1	

*p<0.01 **p<0.05 ***p<0.10

are negatively correlated with parental approval except lack of independence, which shows a positive but little if any correlation. For the middle socio-economic status both emotional instability and personality disintegration had insignificant correlation, with parental behavior. Emotional regression has a significant correlation (-0.26, p<0.10) with parental behavior, but the relationship is inverse. More the parental approval of their adolescents, lower were their levels of emotional regression. Parental approval individually has no correlation with emotional regression, however parental disapproval has a significant negative correlation with emotional regression (-0.34, p<0.02). This means that higher parental disapproval is related to lower emotional regression. Parental disapproval has significant negative correlation with social maladjustment (-0.24, p<0.10), showing that parental disapproval might be related to social maladjustment of their

adolescents. Lack of Independence too shows significant negative correlation with parental approval (-0.27, p<0.05), showing that higher the parental approval higher the level of independence among the children.

Table 4 reveals difference in means favoring the low socio economic status. As a group low socio economic status adolescents emerge as moderately stable on emotional maturity where as those from middle socio economic strata are unstable. The t-values confirm the significance of difference at .01 levels. The analysis of subscales of the Emotional Maturity Scale show similar results barring the dimension of social maturity. The results further show a moderate approval of parents with slight difference in means. The t values show no significant difference at any level of confidence. The level of self-actualization among children in both the socio economic strata remains medium and 't' test reveals no significant difference.

Table 4: Compilation analysis of the scores obtained on various measures

	Low SES (n=50)		Middle SES (n=50)		T
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
i) <i>Emotional Maturity</i>					
a) Emotional	84.52	14.57	96	20.22	**3.25
Unstability	19	4.46	22.28	6.63	**2.9
b) Emotional	18.82	4.17	21.64	5.97	**2.7
Regression					
c) Social	17.1	4.05	19.08	5.19	0.27
Maturity					
d) Personality	15.76	3.78	17.46	6.24	*1.65
Disintegration					
e) Lack of	14.16	3.57	15.14	4.09	1.3
Independence					
ii) <i>MAP</i>	154.6	17.08	150	12.89	0.2
a) Approval	92.46	9.61	90.68	9.84	0.9
b) Dis-	62.16	14.25	59.42	13.48	0.99
approval					
iii) <i>SEAI</i>	169.42	20.71	165.04	13.42	1.26

*p=.05 **p=.25 (two tailed)

DISCUSSION

Adolescence is that period where the crisis of identity is enhanced when the referred is considered neither as an adult nor a child. In western cultures, this stage connotes the passage from childhood to adulthood. But in Hindu society, the concept of adolescence as a stage does not exist in the religious or historical text. The period of ‘*Bramhacharya*’ (celibacy 0-25 years) merged with the next stage of ‘*Grihastha*’ (Householder -25-50 years) without any intervening period in between. It is only the postindustrial context that adolescence has been given a definite status. The words such as ‘*Generation Gap*’ etc. came up in seventies in the Indian literature. Adolescence is now considered an important period in the life span of an Indians.

The present study assessed the social development of adolescent in India with special emphasis on role of parents and socio-economic status. It was conceptualized that highly approving parents would foster emotionally mature and self-actualized adolescents and vice versa. The results reveal that majority of the parents from both the strata i.e. middle socio-economic status and low socio-economic status showed a moderate degree of approval. It was also conceived that parents from different socio-economic strata would have differing practices, which would show in the adolescent’s personality. From the researches

conducted previously Kang and Sibia (1997) found that high achievers shared a better relationship with their parents as compared to low achievers. Parents of high achievers were more loving, trusted their wards more and showed tolerance toward them as compared to parents of low achievers. Dutta et al. (1997) too reached similar conclusions. Bachman (1970) in his survey of 2200, 10th grade boys found that boy’s reports of parental closeness, communication, respect and low punitiveness predicted self-esteem more strongly than any other family or individual variable. In the present research parents were moderately approving irrespective of their socio-economic status. They did not show any extreme levels of approval but a few (18% in low socio-economic status) were highly approving of their adolescents. Adolescents belonging to the low-income group show extreme emotional stability and moderate self-actualization whereas adolescents from the middle socio-economic status fall in the category of unstable to extremely unstable emotional maturity and in case of self-actualization. The class trends show an increase in frequency towards emotional stability in the low socio-economic status whereas in the middle socio-economic status there is concentration towards unstable and extremely unstable. Low socio-economic status children emerge to be more emotionally stable than the middle socio-economic group. Home environment seems to be an important factor in the social development of adolescents. The low socio-economic status parents range from moderate to high approving. It seems that they provide a much more stable home environment for their adolescents, whereas middle socio-economic status adolescents waver between extremely stable to extremely unstable on this scale. The reason may be the basic value system of middle socio-economic status where they flit between traditional and modern parenting skills. Kohn (1969) posited that: a) elements in parents’ social context influence the goals and values parents have for their children b) these values will result in differences in parenting practices and c) differences in parenting behaviors will ultimately result in differences in child outcomes. Taking a large representative, American sample, Kohn (1976) has demonstrated the lower a parents’ social class position, the more likely he or she is to value conformity and emphasize such things as obedience and good manners. The higher the

parents' social position, the more likely he or she is to value characteristics of self-direction. Luster et al. (1989) too reached a similar conclusion, testing Kohn's hypothesis. Gerris et al. (1997) in the study state that in socialization research much emphasis is traditionally placed on the mediating role of parental goals and values to explain relations between social class and child rearing. The general finding is that parents from lower social strata are characterized by more controlling and show less supporting child-rearing behaviors than parents from higher social strata. These differences stem from differences in value orientation. But in the present research the parents from lower socio-economic strata are more helpful in the stable emotional development of their children.

On self-actualization scale too the low socio-economic status adolescents move from moderate to high degree, whereas middle socio-economic status children from moderate to low levels. Lamborn and Steinberg (1991) postulate that autonomy achieved in context of warm, supportive parent-child ties are associated with high self-esteem, self-reliance and work orientations. Sharma indicates similar findings in a study, Saraswathi et al. (1980), who found that children who have a positive self-concept, believe in their abilities and an inclination to conform to the conventional image of sex typed ideal. Such children are also characterized by effective coping strategy in dealing with the challenging situation in their environment. When home environment are favorable the children tend to achieve their identity to optimum levels.

Statistical analysis shows that there is little if any relation between emotional maturity and parental approval, but emotional regression has a significant inverse relationship with parental approval and lack of independence too shows significant negative correlation with it. Though the trend favors low Socio-economic status yet the difference in scores for emotional maturity favor middle socio-economic status significantly in the negative aspects especially in the areas of emotional instability, emotional regression and personality disintegration, in all other spheres the differences are insignificant.

Besides the class specificity in values, culture too plays an important role in shaping parental behaviors (Sharma, 1999). It may be due to this reason that the differences are not significant

on these dimensions. Indian culture values conformity more than creativity and independence. This may be the reason why children score moderately on self-actualization. More stress is on educational achievement than achievement in other areas. Achievement is restricted to those areas where parents' can earn recognition and name. Goodnow (1985) in his study argues that if societies differ in their conceptions of the ideal or desired traits in children then parental beliefs and goals might reasonably differ as parents seek to develop culturally defined traits in their children. Sternberg (1985) too says parents' socialization goals as well as their ideas about children and parenting are largely products of their culture. Hence the parents in this research show similar behaviors with low socio-economic status being more supportive of emotional stability. There is a need for parents to be more interactive with their children to draw out the positive characteristics ties in their children. It is usually from warm-supportive home-environments that emotionally stable and self-actualized children emerge. Looking at the degeneration of value systems in this culture it is imperative that parents maintain a communication linkage with their offsprings and encourage the culturally valued qualities among their children besides a fostering a will for creativity and creative expression. The development of the child's 'self' needs to be looked after for proper development of nation's future 'The children'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author's great fully acknowledge the contribution of Sarika Manhas (presently lecture in P.G. Department of Home Science, University of Jammu) and Pooja, M.Sc student of Human Development, for their contribution towards data collection

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