

Parental Attachment, Inter-Parental Conflict and Late Adolescent's Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between parental attachment, inter-parental conflict and self-efficacy among 374 college students aged 17 to 19 years old in Iran. The probability proportional to size sampling technique was used to obtain sample size. The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, the Children's Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale, and the General Self-Efficacy Scale were used to measure parental attachment, inter-parental conflict and self-efficacy, respectively. Results of Pearson correlation coefficient showed that parental attachment was positively and inter-parental conflict was negatively associated with adolescent's self-efficacy.

Keywords: parental attachment, inter-parental conflict, self-efficacy, adolescent

1. Introduction

Adolescence is characterized as a risky and turbulent period of life time (Bandura, 1997). Adolescents face significant amount of changes in physical, emotional and cognitive aspects as well as increasing expectation from family and society (Hazen, Schlozman, & Beresin, 2008). The sense of self-efficacy is important element to overcome difficulties and success during adolescent's lifetime. Self-efficacy is defined as a personal perceived capability to accomplish specific tasks to achieve the desired results (Bandura, 1997; Ormrod, 2006). Self-efficacy beliefs illuminate how people think, behave and feel (Bandura, 1994). Past research (Bandura, 1997; Caprara, Steca, Cervone, & Artisticco, 2003; Ferla, Valcke, & Schuyten, 2008; Luszczynska, Gutierrez-Dona, & Schwarzer et al., 2005) emphasized that adolescent with high self-efficacy tended to have more positive developmental outcomes in physical and mental health, coping efficacy, and academic achievement. Thus, individual with high self-efficacy are more likely to have a greater strategic flexibility, cognitive resourcefulness, and set an encouraging target for themselves and able to control their environment. Individual who believe in their ability, work harder and are more persistent to achieve their goals than those who are unsure about their abilities (Bandura, 1994). However, low self-efficacy has been associated with low academic achievement, depression, anxiety, helplessness as well as negative effects in social and emotional relationships (Bandura, 1996; Goodness, Buhrmester, & Jenkins, 2002; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). As argued by Murphy, Gaughan, Hume, and Moore (2010) adolescent with a low self-efficacy considers difficult tasks as threats and tries to avoid them. They usually have low aspiration and weak obligation to their goals. They may be overwhelmed with a low sense of efficiency which may leads to negative outcomes that affect general well-being.

Adolescent's self-efficacy is influenced by social factors such as, families, school, and peers (Bandura, 1986). According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), family is viewed as an initial source of self-efficacy and known as a primary source for adolescent's well-being. Bandura (1986) revealed four sources of information which are including mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal encouragement and physiological status

that effect on self-efficacy. A person's experience of mastery in the past is the most effective factor in building the sense of self-efficacy. Adolescent learns how to use various sources of efficacy from family, peer and society to develop a steady personal efficacy (Coleman, 2003; Kenny, 1994). Parents who are warmth, responsive, and supportive are more likely to foster trust, competencies and self-efficacy beliefs in adolescent and provide diverse and multiple opportunities for mastery experience (Bandura, 1986). Such beliefs of competence are necessary during transition to different stages of development to help adolescents to cope with the stressful events. Furthermore, adolescents who received encouragement and support from parents develop a strong sense of self independent (Marcia, 1991). According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy can grow through vicarious experiences by role-modeling and observation of parents, sibling and peer. These changes of behavior and thinking during early to late adolescence, prepare adolescents for independency by gaining more mastery experiences. However, adolescent with low self-efficacy take this inefficiency to the new stage of development (Bandura, 1989).

Compared to social cognitive theory, attachment theory emphasizes the importance of parent-adolescent relationships during adolescence. Attachment is defined as an emotional bond established between an individual and a provider of secure base which help one's to explore the environment (Bowlby, 1982). Adolescent constructs his/her internal working models of what he or she can expect about self based on their relationships with first caregiver especially parents (Bowlby, 1982). Past studies (Allen & Land, 1999; Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998; Smetana et al., 2006) shown that adolescents with good attachments to parents have better psychosocial well-being and more knowledgeable in social domain than insecure adolescents. Cooper et al. (1998) revealed that adolescent with secure attachment had more control on their emotions and better adjustment than those with insecure attachment. Secure attachment is important in the development of self and identity during adolescence (Allen & Land, 1999). Smetana, Campione-Bafr, and Metzgef (2006) emphasize that in close and warm parent-adolescent relationship, adolescent spend more direct relationship with mothers and talk more about personal issues such as dating. In positive parent-adolescent attachment, mothers provide more emotional support while fathers provide material and informational support (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). In general, research support that during adolescence, secure attachments with parents linked to high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Arbona & Power, 2003; Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004; Thompson, 1999).

Inter-parental conflict is related to parents' withdrawal, reduced parental physical and psychological availability and negative response of their children and adolescent needs (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Inter-parental conflict negatively effects on family environment and adolescent behavior (Grych & Fincham, 1993; Oh et al., 2011). Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989), emphasize that adolescents within the social contexts have vicarious experience with parental conflict through their parents and parent-adolescent relationships. In social modeling, adolescent usually observe and imitate their parents' behavior to make a pattern of conflictive behavior (Bandura, 1997; Pryor & Pattison, 2007). According to attachment theory inter-parental conflict is related to child maladjustment via it's relation to insecure parent-child attachment (Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2002). As children grow up to adolescents this insecure attachment is expressed as anxious ambivalence, avoidance or disorganized (Belsky, 2002). Reese-weber and Kahn, (2005) suggest that late adolescent observe how parents engaged in conflict and resolve the conflict and consequently practices similar behaviors with their siblings, partner and even parents. Research by Sergin, Taylor, and Altman (2005), Platt, Nalbhone, Casanova, and Wetchleret (2008), and Collin and Dozois, (2008) showed that inter-parental conflict may be stronger predictor of adolescent negative psychosocial consequences such as depression, low self-efficacy and self-esteem (Burns & Dunlop, 2002). Inter-parental conflict may effect on the quality of the parent-adolescent relationships such as using harsh discipline and inadequate supervision (Tillman, 2007; Wolf & Foshee, 2003). Low support may reduce the feeling of independent and sense of self (Buehler, Lange, & Franck, 2007; Schulz et al., 2005) and increases the chance of parent-adolescent conflict (Risdal & Singer, 2004; Grych & Fincham, 1990). As a result, inter-parental conflict may link directly to adolescent's behavior through modeling and exposure to stress and indirectly through changes in the parent-child relationships (Moura, Santos, Rocha, & Matos, 2010).

Markiewicz, Doyle, and Brendgen (2001) shown that inter-parental conflict in family environment negatively affect adolescent security attachment. Inter-parental conflict reduced mother effectiveness and responsiveness toward adolescent and marginalized father form their children and therefore, reduce his emotional and physical availability (Markiewicz, 2001). Past studies shown that maternal and paternal attachments are positively related to adolescent's emotional adjustment (Rice, Cunningha, & Young, 1997) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Malinckrodt, 1992). However, inter-parental conflict is related to low self-efficacy (Canary & Canary, 2013; Weber & O' Brien, 1999) and higher levels of interpersonal and social problem (Endler, Speer, Johnson, & Flett, 2001; Kolb & Griffith, 2009; Rynn, Vidair, & Blackford, 2012). The empirical evidence suggests that

perceptions of inter-parental conflict and parental attachment are related with one another (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Davies & Cummings, 1994), and the interaction between these two constructs may effect on adolescent self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989).

Due to the importance of self-efficacy in general health, academic and occupational success, this study aimed to determine the relationship between parental attachment, inter-parental conflict, and self-efficacy among late adolescents in Iran. Youth are the largest group in Iranian history (Statistical Center of Iran, 2010). More than 35 percent of Iran's populations are between 15-29 years old (Egel & Salehi-Isfahani, 2010; Ghafari & Ghasemi, 2007). Ghasemi (2010) and Neghabi and Rafiee (2013) indicated that 22% of students in Iran suffer personal (e.g., low self-efficacy) and family problem. Previous studies (Azimi, Jannati, & Mahmoudi, 2002; Sadeghian & Heidarian, 2009) found a growing number of psychological problems among college students compared to those who do not pursue college education. Thus, it is important to examine factors that may affect self-efficacy among late adolescent in Iran.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The sample of this study consists of 374 late adolescents (260 female and 114 male), ranging in age from 17 to 19 years old ($M = 18.75$, $SD = .44$), from first semester of University of Medical Science in Hamadan, Iran. Respondents were selected by using probability proportional to size sampling technique. Requirements for participants in this study were having both biological parents and parents were primary caregiver during childhood.

2.2 Procedure

After obtaining approval from University of Medical Science in Hamadan, Iran, the list of first semester students aged between 17 and 19 years old was obtained from administration office. Respondents were invited via email or letter to voluntarily participate in this research. The data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. Participants were given assurance that their information will be kept confidential. They were given appropriate amount of time to complete the questionnaire. The researcher and assistants guided the administration of the questionnaire. The respondents took about 45minuts to complete the questionnaires.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 General Self-Efficacy

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) was used to measure self-efficacy among late adolescents. This is a 10-items scale that assesses a general sense of perceived self-efficacy on 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true of me*), 2 (*hardly true*), 3 (*moderately true*), and 4 (*exactly true*). Example of an item in the scale is "I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort". Total score of the general self-efficacy ranged from 10 to 40. Higher scores reflected higher self-efficacy among respondents. The internal consistency for GSE in this study was .86.

2.3.2 Parental Attachment

The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) by Armsden and Greenberg (1989) was used to assess perceived quality of attachment with parents among adolescents. Attachment to the father and the mother were separately assessed using the same 25 items scale. This scale consists of three subscales, including trust (10 items), communication (9 items), and alienation (6 items). Score for negative items were reversed. Attachment scores for mother and father scale were calculated by aggregating the three subscale scores. Items are rated on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*almost never or never true*), 2 (*seldom true*), 3 (*sometimes true*), 4 (*often true*), to 5 (*almost always or always true*). A sample item from this scale is "My father understands me" or "My mother expect too much from me". Total score of the perceived parental attachment ranged from 25 to 125. Higher scores reflected higher parental attachment among respondents. In this current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for IPPA mother scale was .91 and for father scale was .93 indicating desirable level of internal consistency of the scale.

2.3.3 Inter-Parental Conflict

The Children's Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale (CPIC) developed by Grych et al. (1992) measured inter-parental conflict. This study used only 44 items of 48 items in the scale. Four items were omitted due to possibility of distressing the respondents (Ross & Fuertes, 2010). The scale consists of three subscales which are conflict properties, 17 items; threat to self, 14 items; and self-blame, 13 items. For each item, respondents indicates how true each statement relates to them using a three-point Likert type scale (1 = False, 2 = Sort of true,

3 = True). A sample item for this scale is "I got scared when my parents argued". Total score of the perceived inter-parental conflict ranged from 44 to 132. Higher scores reflected higher inter-parental conflict. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the total CPIC was .91 indicating desirable level of internal consistency of the scale.

3. Data Analysis

In this cross-sectional study the data were analysed by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19. An Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) was used to test the normality of data. Descriptive statistical analyses were used to describe the patterns for all variables. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was utilized to test the relationship between variables.

4. Results

The values of skewness and kurtosis for all variables (Table 1) were within the range between -2 and +2 (Pallant, 2005), indicating no violation of the assumption of normality. In the present study respondents were between 17 and 19 years old (mean = 18.75, SD = 0.44). Of the 374 respondents, 69.5% were female and 30.5% were male. The mean age of the respondents' fathers was 50.66 (SD = 7.28) and mean age of mothers was 45.67 (SD = 6.27). A total of 97.9% of respondents were from intact families and live with both biological parents. A total of 317 (86%) of respondents live on campus while, 57 (15.2%) live off-campus and mostly with their parents. The results of this study revealed that respondents have high parental attachment in particular with their mothers (mean = 99.6, SD = 15.4) than their fathers (mean = 91.3, SD = 19.6). The mean score for inter-parental conflict equals 73.9 (SD = 14.3) and the mean self-efficacy was 29.2 (SD = 4.2). Based on the total score, majority (79.7%) of the respondents indicated low inter-parental conflict (Table 2). Respondents of this study reported high level of self-efficacy (81.8%).

Table 1. Normality of all study variables using skewness and kurtosis

Scales/Subscales	N items	Mean (SD)	5% Trimed Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
General Self-efficacy	10	29.2 (4.2)	29.2	.108	-.280
Mother Attachment	25	99.6 (15.4)	100.2	-.611	-.294
Father Attachment	25	91.3 (19.6)	92.1	-.498	-.324
Inter-parental Conflict	44	73.9 (14.3)	74.0	-.029	-1.031

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation and distribution of respondents by categories of all variables

Variables	Min	Max	n	%
Mother attachment	53	125		
Low level (25-74)			27	7.2
High level (75-125)			347	92.8
Father attachment	31	125		
Low level (25-74)			72	19.3
High level (75-125)			302	80.7
Inter-parental conflict	44	104		
Low level (44-87)			298	79.7
High level (88-132)			76	20.3
Self-efficacy	10.0	40.0		
Low level (10-25)			68	18.2
High level (26-40)			306	81.8

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum.

Pearson Product-Moment was utilized to determine the relationships between parental attachment, inter-parental conflict and adolescents' self-efficacy. Table 3 indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between mother attachment ($r = .35, p < .01$) and father attachment ($r = .29, p < .01$) with self-efficacy. Furthermore results

found a significant negative relationship between Inter-parental conflict ($r = -.22, p < .01$) and self-efficacy. The results are consistent with previous research (Bandura, 1986; Bilgin, 2011; Coleman, 2003; Karavalis, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2003). Adolescent with high perceived parental attachment and low inter-parental conflict tend to exhibit higher sense of self-efficacy believe. In another words, adolescent who perceived high inter-parental conflict within family environment reported lower adolescent-parent attachment and self-efficacy. Inter-parental conflict may reduce adolescent attachment to both parents which may contribute to low parent-adolescent relationship (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Canary & Canary, 2013; Ross & Fuertes, 2010).

Table 3. Correlation matrix for all the variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
1-Self-efficacy	-			
2-Mother Attachment	.356**	-		
3-Father Attachment	.299**	.545**	-	
4-Inter-parental Conflict	-.223**	-.455**	-.539**	-

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (1-tailed).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine the influence of parental attachment and inter-parental conflict on self-efficacy among late adolescents in Hamadan, Iran. The findings of this study indicated a statistically significant correlation between both mother and father attachment and self-efficacy among late adolescents. Adolescents who have high attachment to parents tend to exhibit higher level of self-efficacy. The results of this study is consistent with previous research indicating that secure attachment to mother and father enhanced adolescent's ability in social situation and positively promote self-efficacy (Arbano & Power, 2003; Bilgin, 2011; Coleman, 2003; Malinckrodt, 1992). The result of this study also showed that self-efficacy has stronger correlation with mother than father's attachment. When adolescent attachment system is threatened, usually adolescent turns to mother as a primary secure base (Grossman et al., 2002). During stressful situation late adolescent may reestablish attachment security with their mother to make a model in their own interpersonal relationships and maintain attachment security (Ross & Fuertes, 2010).

Moreover, findings of this study demonstrated statistically significant negative relationships between Inter-parental conflict and self-efficacy. Adolescents who experienced more conflict between parents tend to exhibit lower self-efficacy. Researchers (Banyard & Cross, 2008; Cui, Conger, & Lorenz, 2005) indicated that adolescent who reported high inter-parental conflict may develop lower sense of confidence and mastery experience, which may boost adolescent possibility for negative psychological health. The results also coincide with pervious research which illustrated that aggressive relationship between parents may reduce security attachment between adolescent and parents (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). However, the negative effect of inter-parental conflict may diminish when there is a strong relationship between parents and adolescent (Ross & Fuertes, 2010).

The findings of this study should be interpreted in relation to the limitations of the study. First, this study is cross-sectional and can not explain causal relationships between variables. Second, this is self-report administration and may contain some kind of bias. Third, the populations of study were late adolescents in University of Medical Science in Hamadan, Iran. Therefore, the result of this study cannot be generalized beyond this population. Finally, in this study majority of respondents were female. Previous studies (DeFranc & Mahalik, 2002; Ross & Fuertes, 2010; Sprecher & Sedikides, 1993) indicated that female express themselves more than men and reported more attachment to their families which may have an effect on the result of the study.

Despite of the limitations, this study attempted to identify factors contributing to adolescent's self-efficacy. Further research is needed to examine the relationship between parental conflict and parental attachment with self-efficacy among adolescents of different age range and from various family structures.

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