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## Relationship of parent and peer attachment with coping style of adolescents

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### Abstract

Adolescence is a stage of ups and downs because it involves complex changes in biological, psychological and social functioning. Also parents and peers play a major role in adjustment during this stage. So the present study was conducted to find the relationship of parent and peer attachment with coping style of adolescents. It was hypothesized that parent and peer attachment has a positive correlation with the problem focused coping while negative correlation with the emotion focused coping. In order to verify the above hypotheses, 60 adolescents (22 girls + 38 boys) were selected from a school of Bhiwani. Inventory of parent and peer attachment (IPPA) by Gay Armsden and Mark T. Greenberg (1987), coping strategies scale by A.K. Srivastava (1986) were used to collect the data. The data were analysed by using Pearson's correlation in SPSS 20 software. The results reveals that parent and peer attachment are significantly positively correlated with problem-focused coping while parental attachment is significantly negatively correlated with emotion-focused coping. Peer attachment does not show any significant correlation with emotion-focused coping style.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, parents, peers, attachment, coping, problem-focused, emotion-focused

### Introduction

Adolescence is a stage of ups and downs because it involves complex changes in biological, psychological and social functioning. The term adolescence is a process rather than a period, a process of achieving the desirable growth, attitudes, beliefs and methods for effective participation in society as the emerging adult and the psychology of the adolescents is important in the study of human behaviour (Devdas and Jaya, 1984) [12].

In the study of life span approach, the concept of Attachment has been studied extensively not only because of its importance in infancy and childhood but also how it leaves its traces during the critical phase of adolescence. At first, the concept of Attachment was defined by Bowlby (1973) [7] as the strong affective bond between the infant and the primary caregiver. Later on Ainsworth (1989) [2] also described it as a deep, enduring, affective bond between two persons. Nowadays, attachment is not only considered to be influential during infancy but also be extended to toddlerhood, childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Bowlby, 1982; Lopez & Grover, 1993) [6]. 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; Rice, 1990; Ryan & Lynch, 1989) [2, 1, 22, 24].

Attachment can be broadly divided into two main categories: secure and insecure attachment. When the emotional bond between the child and the caregiver is successful, it leads to secure attachment and if there is any kind of disruption in the attachment formation process, then insecure attachment could result which may manifest in avoidant, ambivalent and disorganized attachment. When a caregiver consistently discourages visible and open expression of affection or distress in an attachment relationship with the child, avoidant attachment manifests. Ambivalent attachment arises due to inconsistency in parenting pattern on the part of the caregiver thereby creating uncertainty on the part of the child with regards to allowance for the expression of anxiety or distress. Disorganized attachment occurs when there are unresolved issues in the life of the caregiver thereby leaving little or no emotional space for a proper attachment formation with the growing child.

Apart from parents, attachment theory is also applicable to children's relationship with peers. Particularly during adolescence, individuals begin to spend increasing amount of time with their peers instead of parents.

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As a result their intimacy reaches its peak during this phase (Berndt, 2002; Collins & Laursen, 2000) [4, 10]. Peers often become sources of emotional and social support to adolescents (Wilkinson, 2004) [25] and strong peer attachment promote healthy adjustment of adolescents (Robinson 2002) [23].

Coping means deal with a situation. According to Folkman & Lazarus (1985) [15], "Coping is the cognitive and the behavioral attempts to manage stress". Folkman and Lazarus (1980, 1985) [14, 15] proposed two types of coping style named as problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. In problem-focused coping style, people try to solve the problem directly often through information gathering, planning or developing new skills while emotion-focused coping is oriented towards managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress (Brannon & Fiest 2009) [9].

### Review of literature

- Khazaie *et al.* (2015) [19] did a study 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.
- Study done by Melissa (2007) [21] 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.
- A study conducted by Howard *et al.* (2004) [16] 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 behaviour whereas insecure attachment was positively related to negative avoidance.
- Highly attached adolescents were more likely to plan about how to cope with their problems constructively than their low attached counterparts (Lazarus 1993).
- McCauly, Greenberg, Burke and Mitchell (1990) [3] suggested that insecure parental attachment often leads adolescents to develop poor coping because it 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. Secure attachment often leads individuals to seek support from others during the turbulent phase of adolescence (Kenny *et al.* 1993) [18].
- 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.

### Objective

The present study was aimed to study the relationship of parent and peer attachment with coping style of adolescents.

### Hypotheses

On the basis of previous studies, following hypotheses were

formulated-

1. There would be a positive correlation between parental and peer attachment and problem focused coping.
2. There would be a negative correlation between parental and peer attachment and emotion focused coping.

### Methodology

#### About the Participants

The sample of this study consisted of 60 adolescents (38 boys and 22 girls) with age ranging from 14-18 years. Purposive sampling technique is used to select the sample. All respondents were students of class XI or XII from a school of Bhiwani, Haryana.

#### Measures

The following measures were used in the present study for different purposes:-

#### 1. Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)

This tool was developed by Gay Armsden and Mark T. Greenberg (1987) [1]. It was used to assess adolescents' perceived attachment toward their parents and peers. It comprised of 25 items in each of the mother, father, and peer sections, yielding three attachment scores (mother, father and peer attachment separately). These items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale as the following: 'Almost never or never true': 1; 'Not very often true': 2; 'Sometimes true': 3; 'Often true': 4; and 'Almost always or always true': 5. The negatively-worded items of the IPPA are scored reversely. The range of the total IPPA score is 25 to 125-the higher the score, the deeper the attachment. The Internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was found to be very high i.e. .87 for Mother Attachment, .89 for Father Attachment, .92 for Peer attachment. Parental and peer attachment scores are moderately to highly related to Family and Social Self scores from the Tennessee Self Concept Scale and to most subscales on the Family Environmental Scale (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) [1].

#### 2. Coping Strategies Scale

This tool was developed by A.K. Srivastava (1986). It comprised of 50 items describing varieties of coping behaviour underlying 2 major categories, Problem-focused coping and Emotion-focused coping. Each of these items was rated on a five point scale varying from "Never" to "Almost Always" on the degree of agreement with the statement. These items were scored as following : 'Never' : 0; 'Always' : 4. The negatively-worded items of the scale were scored reversely The Test-Retest reliability of scale was found to be .92 and validity was also found high.

#### Procedure

To conduct the study, consent was taken from the respective schools from where adolescent volunteers were taken for data collection and rapport were established. They were given a briefing about the aim of present investigation. Instructions were given according to the used questionnaire. They were assured that their information would be kept confidential and used only for research purpose, so they are requested to be open and honest in their responding. After that scales were administered and data were collected.

#### Statistical Analysis

The data were analysed by using Pearson product moment

method in SPSS 20 to find the relationship of parental (both mother and father) and peer attachment with coping style of adolescents.

### Results and discussion

Table 1 shows that parental (mother & Father) and peer attachment are significantly positively correlated with problem focused coping. Hence our first hypothesis “*There would be a positive correlation between parental and peer attachment and problem focused coping*” has been proved.

**Table 1:** Relationship of mother, father and peer attachment with problem-focused coping

| Variable          | N  | Problem focused coping |                       |
|-------------------|----|------------------------|-----------------------|
|                   |    | Pearson Correlation    | Level of significance |
| Mother Attachment | 60 | .246*                  | .05                   |
| Father Attachment | 60 | .232*                  | .05                   |
| Peer Attachment   | 60 | .366**                 | .01                   |

The results indicate that parental attachment has a positive correlation with problem focused coping significant at .05 level while peer attachment has also positive correlation with problem focused coping significant at .01 level. It means that the adolescents who have strong attachment with their parents and peers use more problem focused coping. They try to understand the problem situation better and taking action to deal with it often through information gathering, planning or developing new skills.

Results also indicate that peer attachment has a strong positive correlation with problem focused coping style of adolescents than that of the parental attachment. It can be understood by the fact that in adolescence, an individual spends more time with his/her peer group than the parents. As a result their intimacy reaches its peak during this time and it may leads to develop enough confidence and self-esteem in the adolescent by which he can easily deal with the surrounding. The present findings support the previous studies done by Lazarus (1993) who 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. Khazaie *et al.* (2015) [19] also showed that adolescents who have high peer attachment use more problem-focused coping.

**Table 2:** Relationship of mother, father and peer attachment with emotion-focused coping

| Variable          | Emotion-focused coping |                     |                       |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
|                   | N                      | Pearson Correlation | Level of significance |
| Mother Attachment | 60                     | -.295*              | .05                   |
| Father Attachment | 60                     | -.257*              | .05                   |
| Peer Attachment   | 60                     | -.141               | Non-significant       |

Table 2 shows that parental attachment (mother and father) is significantly negatively correlated with emotion focused coping while peer attachment is not significantly correlated with emotion focused coping. Hence our 2nd hypothesis “*There would be a negative correlation between parental and peer attachment and emotion focused coping*” has been partially accepted (only for parental attachment and not for peer attachment).

The results indicate that parental attachment has a negative correlation with emotion focused coping significant at .05

level. It means that the adolescents who are less attached with their parents used emotion focused coping. They oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress. They use various techniques such as avoidance, denial, acceptance, blaming, acting out etc. to minimize the stressors involved in a problem situation. The results are supported by the study done by Melissa (2007) [21] who reported high parental attachment were less likely to use avoidant coping strategies than their low attachment counterparts.

Peer attachment does not significantly correlated with emotion focused coping. It can be attributed to the fact that parental attachment may help to manage such type of adolescents (low on peer attachment) not to use emotion focused coping. Armsden’s (1986) study also suggest that peer attachment is associated with the use of more problem-solving coping strategies relative to emotion- managing efforts in stressful situations.

### Conclusion

From the present findings, it could be concluded that:

- Strong parental and peer attachment lead to develop problem-focused coping skills in the adolescents. Such type of adolescents take specific actions or making plans to take such actions or take attempts to manipulate or alter the environment.
- Weak parental attachment lead to develop emotion-focused coping skills in the adolescents. Such type of adolescents oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress. They use various techniques such as avoidance, denial, acceptance, blaming, acting out etc. to minimize the stressors involved in a problem situation.

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