

Full Length Research Paper

A study of adolescents' perception of parental influence on academic activities

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Research has established the importance of family support, and parental support in particular, in predicting adolescents' educational and psychological outcomes. The family has been identified as a critical force even more powerful and direct than teachers in their children's education. A number of studies have attempted to compare the belief, attitudes, values of parents and their children and also the extent to which parents opinion agree or conflict with that of children. These studies have shown that parents' potentially influence adolescent's identities. However, few studies have been undertaken to find the perception of adolescents about parental influence. The present study investigated the perception of adolescents about their parents' influence in academic activities. The sample for the present study comprised two hundred senior secondary school students namely Class XI studying in various private, government, central and aided schools of Delhi. The tool used was a self constructed questionnaire comprising 40: agree-disagree statements on a 5-1 Likert scale. The scores indicated that Class XI students belonging to private, government central and government aided schools of New Delhi perceived their parents as influencing their academic activities and the factor which was most influential was parental support.

Key words: Adolescents, parental support, perception, parental influence, academic activities.

INTRODUCTION

The linkage between family and adolescent academic experiences is part of a larger dynamic process unfolding over time. The life course paradigm views human development as an interplay between individual's developmental trajectories and the trajectories of significant others (Elder et al., 1985). One of the most intuitive examples of this linked life principle is the parent-child relationship. Parents, through the choices and decisions they make for themselves and their children influence how their children grow and develop over time (Furstenberg and Hughes, 1995). This view of the linked lives of parents and children offer unique insights into the implications of parents' influence in adolescents well being including adolescent's academic experiences.

Of all the important, fateful and determining influences

of children, the relationship with his/her parents comes first. This is the very life line through which he/she establishes his relationships for better or worse with the rest of the world.

A number of studies have documented that children and adolescents who enjoy emotionally close relationship with their parents report better psychological health in adulthood (Snary, 1993). Increasing empirical evidence support the theoretical proposition that psychological well being in adulthood has roots in the affective climate of one's family of origin. The quality of parent child relationship has been argued to have a significant impact on the competence, resilience and well being of individuals.

The influence of parents on occupational and education-

al attainment has also been a subject of great interest for vocational and career educators and researchers alike. It has been widely recognized that families play a major role in shaping the educational and career decisions of their members. Parental Influence is found to be a major determinant of adolescent development.

Over the past two decades, growing evidence has also shown that parents are valuable resources for public education, one that remains largely untapped. The promotion of home school collaboration by involving parents in school or at home in their children's education has also become a major concern for policy makers and educators as family and school are two of the most significant contexts in which adolescents grow and develop. The influence of these two contexts, positive or negative, in shaping the lives of adolescents as they grow into young adulthood cannot be overstated. The type and extent of support they receive from the adults in these contexts, namely, teachers and parents, will determine to a large extent their confidence in their academic abilities while at school, their future educational and career expectations and aspirations. Since many educationists and psychologists have drawn attention to the great complexity of the 'network of interrelated family environment variables associated with children's cognitive and affective domain, it would be worthwhile to study how adolescents perceive the role of parents in the learning process.

Findings also reveal that social influence at home (that is parental expectations and college plans for children) was more than those in school (that is peer influence and teacher expectations). In particular parental support has positive effect on their children's academic performance (Eccles and Harold, 1983). In this vein, Steinberg (2001) concluded that when parents were more involved in their children's schooling (for example, helping with homework, helping to select courses, and keeping abreast of school's progress) children performed better academically and were more engaged in high school.

Given the potential influence of parents on adolescents' academic activities it seems then that families have the potential to catalyze achievement orientations in their children. It is worthwhile to examine children's perceptions of parents' influence on their academic activities because developmental research suggests that children's perceptions of events in their environments often mediate the influence of those events on their behavior and learning.

Rationale for the study

Although extensive research linking parent involvement to a variety of positive student outcomes has been conducted at virtually all grade levels, educators' understanding of this link has been significantly shaped by the predominance of studies at the elementary level. Also a search of literature and analytical studies reveal that little

has been done to analyze statistical data overtime with a focus on high school students. The present study would focus on students at senior secondary level. Senior secondary level is the most crucial period when career decisions are taken by adolescents. With diversity of factors at play, it is not surprising that there is no unifying theory of adolescent development, but also becomes clear why it provides ample scope for research perspectives to dwell on their career plans and their perception of parental influence. The senior secondary school context presents a number of challenges that may undermine parents' ability to be effectively involved in their adolescents' education. Therefore, it makes it all the more important that such concerns be validated for Indian adolescents in typical Indian social and culture milieu. Because of the relative scarcity of literature which focused on adolescents' perceptions about their parents' influence, the need for such research will prove to be beneficial for educationists, schools, parents, counselors, policy makers, and adolescents themselves.

Objective of the study

The study aimed at investigations on adolescents' perception of parental Influence on their academic activities.

Demographics of the sample

Population of the present study comprised of senior secondary students studying in various schools of Delhi, India. Senior secondary level is the most crucial time in a students' life as major decisions regarding further studies and career are taken. Also, in the Indian education system, it is when students enter class XI or intermediate that choices are made regarding the stream or course which they want to pursue. Many factors come to play before they arrive at any decision regarding their selection of course/stream like their vocational interests, aspirations, expectations, influence of parents, peers, family members, friends etc. Hence, it was decided to include class XI students.

In India, school category is determined as per state pattern on his basis of the highest class in a school. A school having classes up to V will be termed as primary school. School having classes up to VIII will be termed as upper primary. Class up to IX and X will be termed as secondary school and a school having highest classes either XI or XII will be termed as higher secondary or senior secondary school, Depending on the management, school systems vary from Government to Government Aided, to Private to Central and are affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education or State Boards.

The sample for the present study comprised of two hundred senior secondary school students namely Class

XI studying in various private, government, central and aided schools of Delhi (25 boys and 25 girls from each type of school). Their age ranged from 15 to 19 years and was of Indian nationality. Convenient sampling technique was adopted.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to study the perception of students about parental influence towards their academic activities, a self constructed questionnaire was used. Various items to study the perceptions were categorized into 6 dimensions namely parent-child relationship, parental expectations, parental anxiety, fathers' support and mothers' support. Reliability was established, Crombach's alpha being 0.85. Also the tool was validated by experts comprising of educationists, psychologists and counselors.

Parent child relationship

It had ten statements aimed to understand the respondents' perceptions of parent child relationship.

Parental expectations

The eight statements in this dimension dealt with students' perception of parental expectations.

Parental anxiety

The six statements in this scale were about perceived parental anxiety.

Fathers' support

The eight items included in this dimension dealt with support provided by fathers.

Mothers' support

The eight statements identical to that of previous dimension of fathers' support were to study the support provided by mothers.

The responses of the students in the above dimensions were obtained on 5 point scale: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4) Undecided (3) Disagree (2) and Strongly disagree (1).

RESULTS

A perusal of Table 1 shows the scores of respondents in various dimensions of perceived parental influence.

Parent-child relationship

The items in this subscale dealt with children's perception of their relationship with parents. The items were concerned with whether students shared their feelings with parents, whether any generation gap existed, whether parents were helpful, friendly etc. in helping their children.

The maximum score for this dimension was 50. So far

as the mean value is concerned it was the same as its neutral value of 30 which means that children perceived their parents as having a neutral relationship with them.

Parental expectations

The items were intended to measure students' perceptions about their parents' expectations on them. The analysis of mean score in this dimension when computed showed that it was much higher than its minimum score of 8 and neutral value of 24 implying that children perceived their parents as having high expectations about their studies as well as future career.

Parental anxiety

The mean score of this dimension is only slightly more than the neutral value of 18. It can be inferred that students did not perceive their parents as unduly anxious about their children's performance. At the same time, they perceived their parents to be concerned about their future.

Fathers' support

Parental support is said to have a positive impact on children's academic activities. The mean score of perception of fathers' support was slightly more than the minimum of 8 and neutral value of 24. It may be interpreted that children perceived their fathers as supportive with respect to their academic activities.

Mothers support

Similarly the sample of students perceived their mothers also to be supportive. The slightly higher score in this dimension implies that children perceived their mothers as more supportive and understanding than their fathers. Percentage for each dimension was also calculated to see which of the factors had the most influence as perceived by students. The scores are tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2 reveals that the most influencing factors were mother's support with 71%, followed by father's support 70%, with very slight difference between the two.

Parental anxiety too seems to affect their educational matters with 66%, parental expectations 65.2% and parent child relationship 60%. Among the various dimensions, the factor which was comparatively less influential was parent child relationship.

From the results obtained, it can be inferred that From the results parental support was perceived to be the most influencing factor by students at senior secondary level followed by parental anxiety. Parental expectations also influenced the sample to some extent. The sample did

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of dimensions of perceived parental influence.

Dimension	No. of items	Total score	Neutral score	Mean	S.D
Parent child relationship	10	50	30	30.03	5.4
Parental expectations	8	40	24	26.3	5.5
Parental anxiety	6	30	18	20.36	4.36
Father support	8	40	24	28.07	5.4
Mother support	8	40	24	29.46	5.6

Table 2. Mean and percentage of dimensions of perceived parental influence.

Dimensions of perceived parental influence	No. of items	Maximum score	Mean	Percentage (%)
Parent child relationship	10	50	30.0	60.0
Parental expectations	8	40	26.1	65.2
Parental anxiety	6	30	20.3	66.5
Father support	8	40	28.0	70.0
Mother support	8	40	28.4	71.0

perceive a positive relationship with their parents but this dimension was comparatively less influential.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results, this research study has provided some interesting findings and ideas about perceived parental influence in Indian context. Some of the results in many respects confirm what has been found in previous studies with samples from other countries, societies or cultures. It also uniquely sheds light on the nature of parental influence as perceived by adolescents.

The study examined adolescents' perception of parental influence on their academic activities. Consistent with this speculation, the sample group perceived their parents as having positive influence and the factor that influenced most was parental support.

Study conducted by Linver et al. (1997) demonstrated that adolescents' perception of parental values contributed significantly on college goals an adolescent sets for herself. Studies of the middle and secondary grades also reflect the above findings of this study. Van Voorhis (2001) and Simon (2001) found that regardless of students' background or prior school achievement, influence of parents in various ways had a positive impact on achievement, attendance, behavior, and course credits completed. Significantly, parental guidance and support of their adolescent students is critical to secondary students' school and future success (Sanders et al., 1999). Studies by Flowers et al. (2003) reported that maternal educational expectations were much stronger in predicting students' college aspirations than were paternal educational expectations.

Reports from U.S. adolescents indicate that, in general, teens feel close to their parents, think highly of them, and even want to spend time with them. In addition, research shows that quality parent-child relationships are linked to a wide range of positive outcomes for adolescents, such as mental and emotional well-being, adjustment, and social competence, and to lower levels of problem behaviors, such as substance use, delinquency, and premature sexual activity. Moreover, data from research on parent-adult child relationships indicate that psychological, social, and health benefits persist over time. The parent-child relationship clearly represents an important influence on adolescents' lives. Further, comparable analyses in 21 industrialized countries indicate that greater parent-adolescent interaction is related to more positive outcomes. Thus, not only are parent-adolescent relationships and interactions generally positive, but they also matter.

Conclusion

The results of this current study have in a way highlighted some of the similarities and the unique differences between other previous studies done with samples in western societies. For instance, parental support was found in this current study as a significant influence on the academic activities among Indian adolescents just as previous studies with samples from diverse countries such as the United States and Ecuador found out (Ingoldsby et al., 2003). In conclusion it appears based on this study that, among the various dimensions of parental influence the factor which most affected the academic activities was parental support with mothers'

support slightly more than that of fathers. Children also perceived their parents as having high expectations about their studies as well as future career. Parental anxiety too affected the students to a considerable extent.

In as much as parents are seen as very significant people in the lives of their children universally, the role parents play within families is shaped in significant ways by existing gender-role expectations.

A very distinguishing feature in most traditional societies, including India is the inherent authority of parents and especially fathers whose actions cannot be questioned (Arnett, 2004). In accordance with this principle of inherent authority, this study hypothesized that paternal support was expected to be more strongly influencing academic activities than were maternal support. But the study showed that mothers' support was found to be slightly more positively related to academic activities than that of fathers'.

In conclusion, it appears based on this study that, although parenting and parent-adolescent relationships takes place among families across the world, this process is also shaped in very significant ways by each society's culture. Therefore, for us to understand and appreciate very well the impact parental behaviors have on adolescent's development of social competencies such as academic activities which this study tried to unearth, there have to be a continuous concerted effort from researchers across all societies.

IMPLICATIONS

For policy makers

Since parental influence as perceived by children has a significant impact on their academic activities, engaging parents in active support of children's education would provide the context that will assist adolescents in being successful. Parents of adolescents should be the target of early awareness programs. Parents shape the expectations of children, and programs encouraging parents would benefit the children in many ways.

For parents

Parents can make a significant contribution to their child's education in a number of ways. At primary age, there are a number of home learning support programmes which have shown successful outcomes, particularly those promoting positive adjustment and improved literacy. But the situation at secondary age may be different. Rather than actual involvement in the educational process, the parental role is more about supporting aspirations and educational activities.

It may surprise some parents to know that their

adolescent children continue to value them during these years and that parental influence continues to be significant for their academic activities but that, indeed, is what research indicates.

For children

Children's learning evolves from their active processing of information and their active construction of personal knowledge. While adults' and children's perceptions and understandings of events they both experience (for example, parental involvement activities) are often correlated they may also reflect differences consistent with variations in cognitive development across childhood and adulthood, as well as differences associated with personal interests in and perspectives on events experienced in common. Children need to value the support provided by their parents at the same time they should not buckle under pressure or from parental expectations.

For schools

Schools should welcome parents and acknowledge that their active involvement contributes significantly to the achievement of their students.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Findings from the present study should be interpreted within the context of several research limitations.

Firstly, a convenience sampling size of 200 Indian adolescents drawn from only 8 senior secondary schools in New Delhi is very limited in terms of geographic area representation. Again, making generalizations with this sample, as representing the views of all adolescents in India and even as that of all adolescents in an ethnically diverse society such as India is not adequate.

Secondly the assessment of the parental influence is based on adolescent self-report and not on direct observation. Self-report measures of parenting are typically only modestly correlated with measures based on direct observation (Holden and Edwards, 1989), Adolescent perceptions do, however, offer distinct advantages over alternatives. The impact of parenting on adolescents is likely to be mediated by how adolescents perceive their parents and there is substantial support for the reliability and predictive utility of adolescent ratings of the parent-child relationship.

A third limitation of this study was that only certain dimensions of parental influence were studied.

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