

Relationship between parental bonding and factors of aggression among adolescents

Aastha Sharma

Department of Psychology, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Recent studies are only beginning to suggest possible linkages between children's parental attachment and aggression. This study focuses on highlighting the possible link that may exist between parental bonding (Maternal care, maternal overprotection, Paternal care and Paternal overprotection) and aggression (Total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility) in adolescents. The present investigation was conducted to see whether adolescents differing in parental bonding differed significantly on aggression. For this purpose, a group of 80 adolescents (40 males and 40 females) was administered the Aggression Scale (given by Buss & Perry, 1992) and the Parental Bonding Instrument (given by Parker et al., 1979). The socio-economic status of the group was controlled. The data was analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation and significant results were obtained. Results indicated that parental bonding indeed has a direct influence on the level of aggression of the adolescent.

Keywords: aggression, parental bonding, adolescents

Human beings are a species where the human child is nurtured and cared for unlike any other species. It is beyond just food, shelter and survival skills. Of all phases in the life of a human, adolescence is a critical phase that has its ups and downs.

The child supplies the power but the parents have to do the steering.

- Dr. Benjamin Spock, *Dr. Spock's*

Baby and child care

Adolescence is defined as the transitional stage of physical and mental human development that occurs between childhood and adulthood. This transition involves biological, social, and psychological changes, though the biological or physiological ones are the easiest to measure objectively. Freud believed that adolescence is fraught with internal struggle. He viewed the pre-adolescent "latency" period as a time when the child develops a balance between the ego and id. Upon entering the "genital" phase of adolescence, the child is bombarded with instinctual impulses that disrupt this balance. The ego is torn between the strong impulses of the id and the restrictions of the superego. This conflict makes adolescence a time of tremendous stress and turmoil. According to Piaget (1983), by sharing experiences with peers, adolescents learn that many of their thoughts and feelings are shared by almost everyone. This realization helps them to feel less unique or less "abnormal" and more like others. Hence, peer influence plays an important role in this stage and it is vital for parents to keep a check. The role of the parents is to provide a conducive environment for the adolescent's successful transition into a responsible and productive adult.

In order to achieve this goal, the parents need to establish a strong bond with their adolescent. This bond cannot be formed over night and in fact begins from the time that the child is born. Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth, Bell, and Stayton (1975) emphasized the central role of the relationship between parent and child in normal development.

The attachment theory is based on the idea that an infant's first attachment experience (initially to his or her mother) profoundly shapes the social, cognitive, and emotional developments that follow (Bowlby, 1969). The theory by Chase-Lansdale et al. (1995) suggests that a mother who responds with sensitivity and consistency to her child's needs sends a series of important messages to her infant that build trust and security: "I am here for you", "You can count on me", "I am interested in you," "Your actions matter," and "You are loved". The Bobo doll experiment by Bandura (1961), found that children exposed to aggressive adult model acted more aggressively than those who were exposed to a nonaggressive adult model. This experiment suggests that parents, who are an integral part of the environment of the adolescent, directly impact his/her behaviour. This behaviour is likely to be aggressive if the behaviour of parent is aggressive.

Researchers believe that moderate control, combined with warmth, allows for incremental and appropriate granting of psychological autonomy to children and adolescents so that they can become more competent (Steinberg et al., 1994). Aggression and outbursts are linked to poor parenting practices (Patterson et al., 1992). Using the Parental Bonding Instrument and measures of psychological distress, the researchers noted that across cultures, the combination of high control and low caring by parents predicted psychological distress in children and that punishing control was linked to aggressive behavior (Chambers et al., 2000). The same study noted differences in the reaction to low care by mothers and fathers. Adolescence is a period where the child grows independent and finds an identity which makes him or her an individual. The individuation process that is vital in the development of identity is not disrupted by parental support, but rather nourished (Sartor, 2002). Instead of pulling away in opposition to their parents, some researchers note, adolescents are forming their identities by renegotiating their place in the family, evolving to a more peer like status with their parents (Steinberg et al., 1994). Hence, parental bonding is of prime importance in the development of an adolescent. When teens feel connected to their families and when parents are involved in their children's lives, teens are protected (Blum and Rinehart, 1997).

Girls generally are more prone to outcomes that are often referred to as “internalized” or “quiet” such as depression. Boys, on the other hand, are prone to react to difficulties by externalizing acting out and being aggressive. Mothers are more typically primary caregivers and tend to spend more time with their children, while fathers are more likely to participate in leisure activities with their children (Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn, 1991).

Parental bonding

Parental bonding is the emotional and physical attachment occurring between a parent or parent figure and offspring that usually begins at birth and is the basis for further emotional affiliation. According to Lezin et al. (2004), parental bonding is characterized by a positive, stable, emotional bond. It is measured by acceptance, spending time together, the parent's availability to the child and enjoyment of being with the child. When connection is high, the child learns to trust adults, values himself or herself, and becomes willing and able to initiate social interaction outside of the home. Bonding is a gradually unfolding experience that can take hours, days, weeks, or months to develop.

Paternal Bond: A paternal bond refers to the relationship between a father and his child. The father of a child can develop the bond during the pregnancy of his partner, feeling attachment to the developing child. Research indicates that this may have some biological basis (Palmer, 2002).

Maternal Bonding: The maternal bond is typically the relationship between a mother and her child. There are hundreds of factors, physical and emotional, which influence the mother-infant bonding process. The mother-child bond is considered to be a special and somehow magical connection which transcends mere relationship (Mitchell, 1995).

Aggression

Aggression is defined as acts of hostility, injury, violence, or extreme self-assertion. Aggression takes a variety of forms among humans and can be physical, mental, or verbal. Anderson & Bushman (2002) state that human aggression is any conduct aimed at another individual with the immediate goal to cause harm. Anderson & Carnagey (2004) illustrate instrumental aggression as a deliberate means of attaining some target other than hurting the victim, and being proactive rather than reactive.

Hypotheses of the study

In the present study, the following hypotheses were framed:

- It was expected that there would be an inverse relationship between maternal care and total aggression as well as the components that include physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility.

- It was expected that there would be a direct relationship between maternal overprotection and total aggression as well as the components that include physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility.
- It was expected that there would be an inverse relationship between paternal care and total aggression as well as the components that include physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility.
- It was expected that there would be a direct relationship between paternal overprotection and total aggression as well as the components that include physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility.

Method

Participants

The present study comprised of 50 adolescents (25 males and 25 females) in the age group of 13-19 years.

Instruments

Keeping in view the main objective of the study, the following tools were employed:

1. Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI)
2. Buss and Perry Aggression Scale

Statistical analysis

On the basis of the formulated hypotheses, the data was analysed by using the Pearson's formula for correlation. The correlation was calculated for maternal care, maternal overprotection, paternal care and paternal overprotection on variables of total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility.

Relevance of the present study

Adolescence is a crucial stage of development, wherein, various hormonal changes are taking place in the individual. They face a lot of pressure in the form of peers, academics and other factors present in their environment. This makes them prone to aggression and emotional outbursts which can be avoided if the bond between the adolescent and his/her parents is present. A certain level of compatibility and understanding is a must for a wholesome development of the adolescent. The behavioural and psychological problems are heightened in case the children do not have parental bonding.

Results

Correlations were calculated to test the four hypotheses. The obtained results are presented in the following tables.

Table 1: Showing the correlation for total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility in adolescents as regards maternal care, maternal overprotection, paternal care and paternal overprotection.

	Total	Physical Aggression	Verbal Aggression	Anger Aggression	Hostility
Maternal Care	-0.56**	-0.52**	-0.39**	-0.44**	-0.44**
Maternal Overprotection	0.11	0.16	-0.007	0.004	0.19
Paternal Care	-0.54**	-0.51**	-0.18	-0.47**	-0.51**
Paternal Overprotection	0.36**	0.41**	-0.05	0.27	0.48**

** Significant at 0.01 level

Discussion

Table 1 shows the correlation for total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility in adolescents as regards maternal care, maternal overprotection, paternal care and paternal overprotection. While considering maternal care, the correlation values for total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility are -0.56, -0.52, -0.39, -0.44 and -0.44 respectively. The negative sign indicates an inverse relation. These values are found to be significant at 0.01 level, which signifies that if this study is repeated under similar circumstances, there is a 99% chance that similar results would be obtained. The results clearly indicate that there is an inverse relationship between maternal care and total aggression as well as the components that include physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. This implies that when maternal care is high, the other variables, namely, total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility will be low and vice versa.

The correlation values for total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility as regards maternal overprotection are 0.11, 0.16, -0.007, 0.004 and 0.19 respectively. These values are not found to be significant. The results indicate that there is a relationship between maternal overprotection and total aggression as well as the components that include physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility but this relationship is weak and may not surface in the event of a repetition of the study even under similar circumstances. Moreover, there is a direct relationship between maternal overprotection and the variables of total aggression, physical aggression, anger and hostility. However, it is observed that the relationship between maternal overprotection and verbal aggression is negative. This implies that when maternal overprotection is high, total aggression, physical aggression, anger and hostility will also be high but verbal aggression shall be low.

Hence, it can be safely inferred that maternal bonding does indeed play a vital role in the level of aggression in the adolescent. According to Kobayashi et al. (1995), children's bonding to their mother was found to decrease their aggression. Patterson (1982) suggests that fathers are more distant, more aversive, less talkative and less approving. He also speculates that mother, as the primary caretaker, bears the brunt of the emotional stressors while the father-child interactions are but a weak reflection of the mother-child interactions and thus, determine less of a child's behaviour.

The correlation values for total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility in adolescents as regards paternal care are -0.54, -0.51, -0.18, -0.47 and -0.51 respectively. The negative sign indicates an inverse relationship. The values for total aggression, physical aggression, anger and hostility are found to be significant at 0.01 level, which signifies that if this study is repeated under similar circumstances, there is a 99% chance that similar results would be obtained. The value for verbal aggression is, however, not found to be significant. The results clearly indicate that there is an inverse relationship between paternal care and total aggression as well as the components that include physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. This implies that when paternal care is high, the other variables, namely, total aggression, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility will be low and vice versa.

The correlation values for total aggression, physical aggression,

verbal aggression, anger and hostility in adolescents as regards paternal overprotection are 0.36, 0.41, -0.05, 0.27 and 0.48 respectively. The values for total aggression, physical aggression and hostility are found to be significant at 0.01 level, which signifies that if this study is repeated under similar circumstances, there is a 99% chance that similar results would be obtained. The values for verbal aggression and anger are, however, not found to be significant. The results indicate that there is a relationship between paternal overprotection and total aggression as well as the components that include physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility but this relationship is direct in case of total aggression, physical aggression, anger and hostility and inverse in case of verbal aggression. This implies that when paternal overprotection is high, total aggression, physical aggression, anger and hostility will also be high but verbal aggression shall be low.

Hence, it can be safely inferred that paternal bonding plays a pivotal role in characterising the level of aggression in the adolescent. Various researchers found that father love is not only as important as mother love to children's adjustment and well-being, but it may even be a better predictor of some outcomes including personal and psychological adjustment, aggression and delinquency disorders, and substance abuse (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Newman (1989) and Youniss and Smollar (1985) found that the father-adolescent relationship was perceived to be less positive than was the mother-adolescent relationship. But the present investigation reveals that the paternal bonding is just as important as the maternal bonding for the adolescent if not more. Barnes & Olson (1985) and Noller & Bagi (1985) have found that the frequency of father-adolescent communication was higher than mother-adolescent communication.

Therefore, the immense importance of parental bonding in determining the level of aggression in an adolescent cannot be trivialised. Michiels et al. (2008) propose new ways of thinking about the role of parents in the development and course of children's relationally aggressive behaviour. Some studies have shown that paternal and maternal parenting styles are different (Clausen, 1996; Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Noller & Callan, 1990; Paulson & Sputa, 1996), whereas others have emphasized the similarities (Baumrind, 1991; Smetana, 1995; Stice & Barrera, 1995). Whatever the case maybe, it can be concluded that the combination of both is essential for the development of the adolescent. A study by Barnow et al. (2004) revealed significant relationships between adolescent aggressive and delinquent behavioural problems and perceived parental rejection and low emotional warmth. Kashani et al. (1988) similarly showed that adolescents with severe psychopathology reported more abuse, less affection, more overprotection, and more concerns about family rapport than did well-adjusted adolescents. Criminological research consistently demonstrates that parenting practices, particularly low levels of warmth/affection and poor supervision/monitoring are strongly related to children's aggressive and delinquent behaviour (Cernovich & Giordano, 1987; Farrington, 1989; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Henry et al., 1993; Herrenkohl et al., 2000; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Mak & Kinsella, 1996; McCord, 1979; Van Voorhis et al., 1988). Parent child connectedness has been linked to a wide variety of outcomes, including personal traits, mental health, specific risk behaviors (violence, substance abuse), conduct disorders (aggression, delinquency) (Lezin et al., 2004).

Parents, who are an integral part of the environment of the

adolescent, directly impact his/her behaviour. This behaviour is likely to be aggressive if the behaviour of parent is aggressive. Child witnesses of domestic violence are more likely to respond to conflict in an aggressive manner (Edleson, 1999).

Thus, the findings clearly state that the adolescents who share a strong bond with their parents are less likely to be aggressive and are behaviourally and psychologically healthier in comparison to those who do not. The results of the present study clearly suggest a strong link between parental bonding and aggression wherein the role of both parents is equally important. This indicates the importance of family structure and attachment with parents in a teenager's life. Therefore, further research in this area can prove useful in preventive programs in order to make the youth an asset to the society as they constitute the nation's human capital.

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