

PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD*

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The study examined the effects of parents' mutual relations and their attitudes on psychological development of the child. The sample of the present investigation consisted of adolescents in the age range 14-16 years. The subjects were selected from three different family structures, viz., both-parent families (n= 90); step-parent families (n= 45) and single-parent families (n= 45). Parental Acceptance- Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) was used to assess parental attitudes towards Ss when they were between seven and twelve years of age. Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) was used to assess subjects' perceptions of their own personality and behavioral dispositions. Significant differences in parental attitudes exist between both-parent families and step-parent families but no such difference appears between both-parent families and single-parent (broken) families. Compared to well adjusted and broken families, Ss in step-parent families have more negative perceptions of their personality dispositions as measured by PAQ. The findings of the present research are consistent with Rohner's parental acceptance-rejection theory (1975).

Rohner (1975) introduced parental acceptance-rejection theory (PART) which explains major consequences of parental acceptance and rejection for behavioural, cognitive, and emotional development of children and for personality functioning of adults. The theory assumes that all human beings have a generalized need for positive response, i.e., love, approval, warmth, and affection, from people significant to them. Children who are rejected by their parents tend to be anxious, hostile, aggressive, and emotionally unstable and have low self-esteem (Rohner, Saaverda, & Granum, 1980). Studies of parent-child relationship demonstrate that the specific methods of discipline are not as important as is the need for the total configuration of family environment and interpersonal interaction to provide the child with a nurturant, predictable, and status giving set of interactions. Sullivan

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(1953) claimed that psychological problems stem from interpersonal relationship, in particular, the parent-child relationship. Children of rejecting parents develop severe anxiety. As they grow up, they feel threatened in almost any close relationship. Consequently, they respond to other people either by rigid, self-protecting behaviour (neurosis) or by withdrawing completely from the social situation (psychosis). Sullivan pointed out that as children each of us develops a "self system" which is a dynamism we learn through appraisal of others, to avoid threats to our security.

Horney (1945) believed that "neuroses" are an expression of disturbance in human relationship resulted from bad parenting, whether punitive or overindulgent, negligent or overprotected. On the other hand, several studies demonstrate that children in warm and loving families are more securely attached (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978); have higher self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967); are more emphatic, altruistic, and responsive to others' distress (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979).

The parent-child relationship is determined by several factors including the marital relationship of parents. Harmonious relations between parents are essential for the stable and well integrated personality of the child. Any disturbance, damage or break in this relationship would have detrimental effects on the growing child. There may be different factors contributing to family disorganization, e.g., death, divorce, desertion, or remarriage of a parent. In our society, especially in the North West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P), the rate of polygamy is far higher than in other parts of the country. Usually, the conditions preceding and succeeding second or later marriages are adverse in nature and lead to a host of unpleasant experiences and psychological disruption in the family. Besides the economic and affectional losses, the child may have to live without one or both-parents, with step-parent, or with relatives.

A child's experiences in the family are greatly influenced by family structure, i.e., whether the child lives in a nuclear or extended family; with two parents or just one; both natural parents or one is a step-parent. Children growing up in one-parent homes, whether due to divorce or death of a parent, have to cope with numerous stresses. The bulk of research evidence tends to demonstrate that children grow up better adjusted when they have a good relationship with one parent than when they grow up in a two-parent home characterized by discord and discontent (Rutter, 1983), and that an inaccessible,

rejecting, or hostile parent is more damaging than an absent one (Hetherington, 1980).

The present investigation was aimed at studying the psychological development of the child as determined by the attitudes of parents towards the child and the specific kind of family structure in which he or she is brought up.

Hypothesis

A broken home is less harmful psychologically than a home driven by conflict between parents and the accompanying disturbance in parent-child relations.

METHOD

Sample

180 families were selected at random from all those families living in N.W.F.P. who have had children ranging in age from 14 to 16 years. These families were selected from five districts of N.W.F.P. namely, Peshawar, Kohat, Mardan, Dera Ismail Khan, and Abbottabad, and were classified into the following three categories according to the criteria specified against each one:

1. **Well Adjusted Both-Parents**

Family Adjustment of the family is revealed in terms of harmonious, balanced, and compatible relations between the parents.

2. **Broken/Single-Parent Family**

In a physically broken home the child does not live with both the parents due to death, divorce or separation of a parent.

3. **Step-Parent Family**

A physically intact home may be psychologically disrupted if the parents lack harmony and accord among themselves culminating in remarriage.

One child (male/female) was selected from each of the families

included in our sample who was in the age range of 14 to 16 years. Out of a total of 180 families, 90 were both-parent families; 45 single-parent; and 45 step-parent families. Family adjustment of the couples was determined by an interview and a questionnaire designed for this purpose. All those families where the husband has more than one wife or is living with the second wife, were defined as psychologically disrupted and conflict-ridden due to marital maladjustment of the couple.

Our total sample consisted of 180 Ss (100 male; 80 female). The differences between male and female total on Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) scores were not significant, therefore, the data were merged.

Instruments

Urdu versions of the two self-report questionnaires, the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) and the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) developed by Rohner et al. (1980) were used. The Urdu translations of the PARQ and PAQ were prepared using back translation technique by Haque (1981) and Riaz (1993).

PARQ

This questionnaire is designed to elicit respondents' assessments of their childhood experiences in terms of perceived parental warmth (i.e., acceptance-rejection), when they were between seven and twelve years of age. The questionnaire consists of two parts, each comprising 60 items. Part I measures attitudes of mother/step-mother towards the child, whereas Part II measures attitudes of father/step-father towards the child. Each part consists of four subscales: parental warmth and affection (20 items); parental hostility and aggression (15 items); parental neglect and indifference (15 items); and parental rejection (10 items).

PAQ

The PAQ measures the way respondents perceive their own personalities/ behavioural dispositions. This questionnaire comprises

42 items divided into seven subscales: hostility and aggression; dependency; negative self-esteem; negative self-adequacy; emotional unresponsiveness; emotional instability; and negative world view. Each sub-scales consists of six items.

Procedure

PARQ (mother/step-mother), PARQ (father/step-father), and PAQ were printed in the form of a booklet. Each *S* was tested individually. The test was given by a male examiner to boys and a female examiner administered the test to girls.

Each subject was given the booklet and asked to fill in the blanks to provide relevant demographic data before answering the questions given in the test booklet. The subject was asked to put a tick mark (✓) in the appropriate column following each statement expressing his/her opinion on a 4-point scale ranging between "Almost Always True" to "Almost Never True".

RESULTS

Results are presented in Tables 1-7. Tables 1-4 show the comparisons among well adjusted both-parents, Step-parent and single-parent (broken) families in terms of parental attitude towards children. The data clearly demonstrate that *Ss* who come from step-parent families perceive not only their step-mothers but even their fathers to be significantly less warm, more aggressive, more neglecting and more rejecting as compared to *Ss* who belong to well adjusted both-parent families.

Tables 5-7 present scores of *Ss* on PAQ. *Ss* who come from step-parent families see themselves as more hostile, more dependent, having a greater sense of negative self-adequacy and self-esteem, emotionally more unresponsive and unstable and having a more negative world view. On the other hand, *Ss* who come from both-parent families have a more self-accepting attitude as compared to those who belong to single-parent (broken) families. However, this difference is not significant statistically. A comparison between step-parent and broken families shows that *Ss* who are living with their step-parents are more hostile, more dependent and emotionally

unresponsive as compared to those who come from single-parent families. Further, these adolescents have a greater sense of negative self-esteem and self-adequacy. No significant differences are found between these groups on scales measuring emotional instability and negative world view.

Table 1

Mean PARQ (Mother) Scores of Adolescents from Both-parents and Step-parent Families (Standard Deviations are Given in Parentheses)

PARQ Subscales	Both-Parents (<i>n</i> = 90)	Step-Parents (<i>n</i> = 45)	<i>t</i>
Warmth and Affection	31.27 (2.13)	46.21 (4.03)	7.643**
Hostility and Aggression	24.82 (2.76)	35.07 (3.42)	5.81**
Neglect and Indifference	22.66 (2.45)	34.86 (3.75)	6.665**
Rejection	19.05 (4.06)	27.36 (5.41)	2.001*
Total Scores	97.79 (6.41)	143.5 (2.57)	6.531**

p* < .05 *p* < .01

Table 2

Mean PARQ (Father) Scores of Adolescents from Both-parents and Step-parent Families (Standard Deviations are Given in Parentheses)

PARQ Subscales	Both-Parents (<i>n</i> = 90)	Step-Parents (<i>n</i> = 45)	<i>t</i>
Warmth and Affection	32.13 (3.35)	39.17 (3.07)	3.422**
Hostility and Aggression	25.52 (2.71)	31.27 (3.21)	3.510**
Neglect and Indifference	22.59 (2.49)	30.15 (3.16)	5.076**
Rejection	17.19 (2.87)	24.17 (2.54)	4.704**
Total Scores	97.43 (5.38)	124.73 (4.18)	4.427**

***p* < .01

Table 3

Mean PARQ (Mother) Scores of Adolescents from Both-parents and Single-parent Families (Standard Deviations are Given in Parentheses)

PARQ Subscales	Both-Parents (<i>n</i> = 90)	Single-Parents (<i>n</i> = 45)	<i>t</i>
Warmth and Affection	31.27 (2.13)	31.65 (8.54)	0.047
Hostility and Aggression	24.82 (2.76)	25.50 (5.05)	0.426
Neglect and Indifference	22.66 (2.45)	23.59 (2.63)	0.722
Rejection	19.05 (4.06)	19.97 (3.60)	0.289
Total Scores	97.79 (6.41)	100.71 (4.86)	0.386

Table 4

Mean PARQ (Mother) Scores of Adolescents from Step-parents and Single-parent Families (Standard Deviations are Given in Parentheses)

PARQ Subscales	Step-Parents (<i>n</i> = 45)	Single-Parents (<i>n</i> = 45)	<i>t</i>
Warmth and Affection	46.21 (4.03)	31.65 (8.54)	1.258
Hostility and Aggression	35.07 (3.42)	25.50 (5.05)	4.055**
Neglect and Indifference	34.86 (3.75)	23.59 (2.63)	4.267**
Rejection	27.36 (5.41)	19.97 (3.60)	1.367
Total Scores	141.13 (2.57)	100.71 (4.86)	10.114**

***p* < .01

Table 5

Mean PAQ Scores of Adolescents from Both-parents and Step-parent Families (Standard Deviations are Given in Parentheses)

PAQ Subscales	Both-Parents (n = 90)	Step-Parents (n = 45)	t
Hostility	10.48 (2.04)	14.86 (1.86)	6.079**
Dependence	14.87 (2.67)	18.52 (1.68)	3.178**
Negative Self-Esteem	10.75 (1.75)	13.40 (1.83)	4.383**
Negative Self-Adequacy	9.99 (1.72)	13.05 (1.75)	5.476**
Emotional Unresponsiveness	12.63 (1.64)	15.71 (1.79)	5.592**
Emotional Instability	15.10 (3.25)	17.60 (1.73)	4.134**
Negative World View	10.91 (1.88)	13.31 (2.00)	3.399**
Total Scores	84.73 (4.63)	105.98 (3.61)	5.864**

** $p < .01$

Table 6

Mean PAQ Scores of Adolescents from Both-parents and Single-parent Families (Standard Deviations are Given in Parentheses)

PAQ Subscales	Both-Parents (<i>n</i> = 90)	Single-Parents (<i>n</i> = 45)	<i>t</i>
Hostility	10.48 (2.04)	12.23 (2.41)	1.792
Dependence	14.87 (2.67)	16.61 (2.01)	1.364
Negative Self-Esteem	10.75 (1.75)	11.75 (1.90)	1.531
Negative Self-Adequacy	9.99 (1.72)	10.67 (1.95)	1.041
Emotional Unresponsiveness	12.63 (1.64)	13.51 (1.88)	1.457
Emotional Instability	15.10 (3.25)	16.53 (2.23)	1.842
Negative World View	10.91 (1.88)	11.53 (2.19)	0.777
Total Scores	84.73 (4.63)	94.74 (3.61)	2.450*

**p* < .05

Table 7

Mean PAQ Scores of Adolescents from Step-parents and Single-parent Families (Standard Deviations are Given in Parentheses)

PAQ Subscales	Step-Parents (n= 45)	Single-Parents (n= 45)	t
Hostility	14.86 (1.68)	12.23 (2.41)	2.546*
Dependence	18.52 (1.68)	16.61 (2.01)	2.446*
Negative Self-Esteem	13.40 (1.83)	11.75 (1.90)	2.088*
Negative Self-Adequacy	13.05 (1.75)	10.67 (1.95)	3.156**
Emotional Unresponsiveness	15.71 (1.79)	13.51 (1.88)	2.857**
Emotional Instability	17.60 (1.73)	16.53 (2.23)	1.710
Negative World View	13.31 (2.00)	11.53 (2.19)	1.781
Total Scores	105.98 (3.61)	94.74 (4.08)	3.315**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

Our findings clearly demonstrate significant differences in children's perception of parental attitudes viz-a-viz family structure. Young adolescents who come from well adjusted both-parent families perceive their parents as being more warm, and accepting. These *Ss* see themselves less hostile, more independent, having a higher self-esteem and feelings of self-adequacy. Emotionally responsive and stable, they possess a positive world view. On the other hand, *Ss* who come from step-parent families perceive their parents (biological father and step-mother) as negative and rejecting. On all the seven scales of PAQ, they rate themselves as hostile, dependent, emotionally unresponsive and instable. The data further reveal that *Ss*' perceptions of maternal attitudes in single-parent families (living with mother, i.e., widowed/divorced/separated) do not differ significantly from those of adolescents who are from both-parent families. These findings demonstrate that among the three groups of *Ss*, only those adolescents who come from step-parent families perceive their parents' attitudes towards them as negative and rejecting. It goes without saying that step-families and step-family members are usually perceived as less positive than other family structures (Bryan, Coleman, Ganong, & Bryan, 1986; Coleman & Ganong, 1987). Several research studies about the nature of step-parent role and different parenting styles do suggest that step-mothers emit more negative behaviours towards their step-children than do step-fathers (Clingempeel, Brand, & Segal, 1987; Clingempeel, Ievoli, & Brand, 1984; Hetherington, 1987; Santrock & Sitterle, 1987). Hetherington (1987) further demonstrated that in step-mothers families, regardless of the parenting style of the step-mother, positive step-mother -step-child relationships did not develop over time, especially in step-mother - step-daughter relationships.

In step-parent families, the quality of step-parent - step-child relationship is generally regarded a better predictor of family adjustment than is the quality of the marital relationship (Clingempeel, Ievoli, & Brand, 1984; Crosbie-Burnett, 1984). In step-parent families, previously established affectional bonds between children and their mothers interfere with the formation of ties to the step-parent. Furthermore, the step-family may be contaminated with anger, guilt, jealousy, value conflicts, misperceptions, and fear (Einstein, 1979).

Single-parent families means primarily families headed by mothers. These families may be created by death of a parent or due to a breakup of the family after divorce, separation, or desertion. Children growing up in one-parent homes have special stresses to contend with. These homes do not have two adults to share child-rearing responsibilities, to serve as gender role models, and to demonstrate the interplay of personalities. Economic problems are usually greater in such families. Depending on the parent, single-parent families can be close, cohesive units even in the face of adverse conditions (Hess & Camara, 1979; Weiss, 1979). The fact that there is no second adult to share responsibilities leads to re-organization in single-parent families. Consequently, these children participate more actively in the family enterprise (Weiss, 1979). Compared to children in both-parent families, these children become more independent, more responsible, take greater part in family decision making, and become more attuned to adult values and concerns. Our findings derived from scores on seven subscales of PAQ clearly show that behaviour and personality dispositions of *Ss* are positively associated with parental warmth. Compared to *Ss* in well adjusted both-parent families, adolescents in step-parent families perceive themselves as more hostile, dependent, emotionally unresponsive, emotionally unstable, having greater sense of negative world view (Table 5). On the other hand, no significant differences were found between *Ss* in both-parent families and single-parent families (Table 6). Furthermore, *Ss* in step-parent families, as compared to single-parent families see themselves more hostile, dependent, emotionally unresponsive and having more negative feelings of self-adequacy and self-esteem. Both of these groups rate themselves emotionally unstable and have a more negative world view (Table 7).

How children eventually grow up as adults depends, besides their constitutional endowments, on mutual relationship of parents and their interactions with family members. Baumrind (1973) reports that preschool children who manifested the most positive behaviours like self-reliance, self-control, competence, and an explorative nature, tended to have parents who were especially loving, consistent, secure, and firm in discipline.

CONCLUSION

Practically every study finds that harmonious relations between parents are essential to the development of a stable and well integrated personality in a child. However, three independent surveys by Nye and Berardo (1973), Landis (1962), and Burchinal (1974) comparing children from happy broken homes with children from unhappy, unbroken homes, showed either few differences or that the children from the broken homes had made better personality adjustments, showed less stress, less psychosomatic illness, and less deviancy than those from the unhappy, unbroken homes.

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