



Parent Effectiveness Training to Improve Parent-Adolescent Relationships

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ABSTRACT The rate of social change in the past several decades has led to certain difficulties in the adolescent period, both for parents and their adolescent sons and daughters. Parents of Kwa-Dlangezwa, a rural area in the province of KwazuluNatal (South Africa), have a concern about unacceptable behaviours which are displayed by adolescents. When they have to face disciplinary action from their parents, they attribute their unacceptable behaviour to disharmonious relationships between them and their parents. One can coin this finger pointing a “blame game”. The paper was undertaken to identify parenting skills parents of adolescents possessed, in order to design a parent-effectiveness plan for them. A pre-test was conducted on 20 parents, who have adolescent children, for three months. Data were collected by means of interviews, and a parenting skills rating scale. Gabs were identified and a workshop on parenting skills was conducted. A post-test was conducted to establish the effectiveness of the programme.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth in the rate of social change in the past several decades has led to certain difficulties in the adolescent period, both for parents and their adolescent sons and daughters (Ostrov and Howard 1988). Keijsers et al. (2010) and Loukas et al. (2010) state that during adolescence, rapid changes take place within the family system, both for children and for parents. Adolescents spend an increasing amount of time outside the family context. Adolescents and their parents have grown up in different worlds. In South Africa the differences caused by the shift from apartheid to democratic society gave black children certain rights and power in decision making. Hope and Jagers (2014) argue that critical social analysis relates to civic engagement, especially for adolescents because this development period offers increased opportunities for young people to expand and refine their social and political point of view and action. Prioste et al. (2015) argue that family relational climate and parenting practices are operative mechanism in the formation of children's values and relationship with parents. However, many contemporary parents may expect the behaviour of adolescents to be similar to their behaviour when they were adolescents (Peterson 1984). Brown and Rinelli (2010) posit that engaging in risky behaviour is one way in which

adolescents test family boundaries to assert their autonomy. Parents and families have to bear in mind that the psychological, social, sexual, political and economic climate in which contemporary adolescents find themselves are matured, and the pressure or challenges they face are contrary to those their parents encountered many years ago. For instance, socialisation and peer interaction is quite different. Unless parents can understand the nature of these differences, efforts to help their children to fulfil their potential and to avoid self-destructive actions are likely to be unsuccessful. Martinez and Forgarth (2001) and Schrepferman and Snyder (2002) emphasise that risk research on the development of antisocial behaviour and outcome research concerning behavioural parent training to reduce risk for early-onset antisocial behaviour have supported common social-etiological mechanisms: coercive family interaction and negative reinforcement. Hoeve et al. (2009) emphasise that parents of young people are often blamed for the delinquent behaviour of their children. Smetana et al. (2002) are of the opinion that less parental behavioural control, including lack of adequate regulation, insufficient rules and restrictions, and lack of knowledge of children's activities, predicts adolescents externalising problems.

The family as a social unit has changed. It is very rare nowadays to find a family with com-

munal child rearing patterns where all members (uncle, aunt, grandmother, grandfather, father and mother) of the family are responsible for rearing children. Prioste et al. (2015) converged on the importance of family members nurturing, protecting within a household for the process of value acquisition and transition. Moreover, the two-parent family, with the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the homemaker and primary caretaker of several dependent children is also seldom found. Instead, two income families, single parent families, one-child families, child headed, grandparent only or blended families (resulting from remarriages) are becoming more common. Brown and Rinelli (2010) indicate that fewer adolescents reside in two biological married parent families, and growing shares live in married stepfamilies or unmarried families, including single-parent and cohabiting families. This contributes to a number of social and academic problems such as an increase of delinquency, adolescent pregnancies, run-aways, school dropouts, and truancy reported cases of child abuse, family violence and a number of children being placed outside the home in foster care or institutions (Peterson 1984; Fennell and Fishel 1998; Debnam et al. 2013).

In the face of increasing changes in today's world, parents are likely to feel somewhat unprepared to parent adolescents. As a result, parents have been using information from the media (such as television programs) in which they rely for parenting skills. Above all, parents always forget that previous ways of parenting are not working in this millennium.

Literature study (Hoeve et al. 2009) highlights the presence of the disharmonious relationships between parents and their adolescent boys and girls. Accordingly, when a relationship problem between parents and adolescents exists, a lot of social problems will affect both of them.

Consequently, there is a need for establishing a parent effectiveness programme for parents and their adolescent children (Van Hasselt et al. 1987). The present research was motivated by the researchers' observation of an increase in the rate of social disharmonious relationships due to social problems between parents and their adolescent sons and daughters (especially among those children who are from 12 years to 18 years) in the Vulundlela Township of Kwa-Zulu Natal. This social disharmonious relationships are due to a number of problems such car

hijacking, drug addiction, cigarette smoking, house breaking or burglary, shoplifting, robbery, murder, sexual immorality and school dropout or truancy.

Previous studies of programs on parenting skills and parent effectiveness training (Gordon 1970; Magwaza and Edwards 1991) have also motivated the researchers.

Very few programmes which adequately equip parents with skills to address the relationship problem between parents and their adolescents exist; among those few most families are not equipped to implement them to the adolescents' sons and daughters.'

Types of Existing Parent Training Programmes

Several parent training programmes are available. There is the Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) by Gordon (2006). This programme emphasises communication and listening- uses workshops experiences to facilitate parental attitude change and equip parents with skills based on child rearing practices. The Adlerian Parent Training and Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) is based on the philosophy of family constellation and helps the parents to understand the positive nature of their children's behaviours (and misbehaviour) as well as their social consequences (Dinkmeyer and McKay 1976; Fennell and Fishel 1998; NREPP 2010). Principles of behaviour modification is characterised by establishing behavioural baselines and then creating schedules of parental punishment and reinforcement directed toward modifying the child's behaviour (Kazdin 2012; Carr 2013). In the Behavioural Parent Training (BPT), which is another model where parents are educated in principles of behavioural modification (Schrepferman and Snyder 2002; Kazdin 2012). Finally, the Parents Survival Training (PST) can also be identified. PST techniques enable parents to help their children to control their own behaviours, so that focus can be on the more positive aspects of the relationship.

The review on various programs of Parent Effectiveness Training indicated that each program has a great impact on improving some aspects of parenting skills. In comparing and contrasting the aforementioned parent training approaches, the PET model was identified as suitable for its effectiveness and methodology. This is so because PET influence mother-child inter-

actions and incorporate role-playing and skill practice whereas other PSTs are limited by the fact that their strategies require training in psychology. Adlerian training creates significantly more consistent discipline and parent-child interaction than behavioural training. Although, it is effective in reducing deviant child behaviours, behaviour modification was significantly less effective whereas Adlerian parent groups fail to be effective in this regard. Although all three of these approaches significantly increased parental democratic attitudes, behavioural training did not generalise to other settings, nor did it sustain these attitudes after one year. Hughes and Wilson (1996) reported contingency management training (based on behavioural principles) to be significantly more effective in reducing a targeted child's than a communication skill conditions (based on PET).

Both Parent Survival Training and Parent Effectiveness Training are helpful in improving parent-child communication, developing home environments consisting of warmth, love and respect, and decreased conflict. In PST children also learn to control their behaviour and focus on more positive aspects of relationship. Although PST is regarded as having effective and helpful strategies, it is difficult for parents to learn because its strategies require training in psychology. PET is particularly valuable for its effectiveness and suitable methodology.

PET was used to empower parents of Vulindlela Township. Not all strategies of PET were used in this paper, but only selected parts were chosen on the basis of their advantages that seemed to fit well with the targeted group and the needs of the targeted group.

Research Questions

The paper sought to answer the following research key question:

- ♦ Can parent effectiveness training enhance the parents' parenting skills and thereby improve their relationship with their adolescent boys and girls?

The proposed investigation was based on the following interrelated questions to ensure that the primary research question is addressed:

- ♦ How do parents deal with adolescent problems
- ♦ How can parents be assisted in order to deal with their adolescents' boys and girls?

Aims of the Paper

The main aim of the paper was to identify parenting skills parents of adolescents possessed in order to established parent effectiveness programme for them. The paper intends:

- ♦ to establish how to handle adolescent problems
- ♦ to establish ways in which parents can be assisted in order to deal with their adolescents boys and girls.

Hypotheses

With respect to parent effectiveness, the researchers predicted that the training program will significantly empower parents by improving parent-adolescent relationships. Furthermore, they hypothesised that the program will result in effective parenting and decrease adolescents' negative behaviour.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present paper used quasi -experimental research design. This design enables the researchers to implement and evaluate a programme to improve parent-adolescents relationship. Many studies (Grimshaw et al. 2000; Naidoo 2001; Mash 2012) have used this design in their studies.

Procedure and Measures

Four measures were used, namely a biographical questionnaire, the interview schedule, parenting rating scale and group meetings. Participants were twenty (20) parents who had adolescent children.

Biographical Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by the two authors. Information included general biographic data such as age, gender and occupation. The data were used to gain information about the demographic composition of the participants.

The Interview Schedule

The interview schedule comprised of open-ended questions which were divided into two

categories, namely, how parents deal with adolescents' problems and how parents want to be assisted to deal with the problem of the adolescents. Information from this tool was used to gain insight about the above mentioned factors.

Parenting Rating Scale

A 10 item parenting rating scale (Table 1) was developed to find out how parents of adolescents perceive their effectiveness as parents. Parents were supposed to rate themselves quantitatively, by assigning values, designated 4=excellent; 3=good; 2=fair and 1= poor to the self-evaluative statements that describe different degrees of how they perceive their effectiveness as parents. A total score of 25 or more indicates good parenting while a total score of 25 or less indicates poor parenting. The parenting rating scale was adapted from Gordon parenting rating scale. Only items that related to were extracted from it.

Table 1: Parenting rating scale

1. Treating your children with respect	1	2	3	4
2. Giving praise and attention	1	2	3	4
3. Involving children in rule making	1	2	3	4
4. exercising firm discipline	1	2	3	4
5. Being constant in punishment	1	2	3	4
6. Encouraging your children to be unique	1	2	3	4
7. Being a model to your child	1	2	3	4
8. Rewarding appropriate behaviour	1	2	3	4
9. Maintaining a good parent-adolescent relationship	1	2	3	4
10. Enjoying your children	1	2	3	4

Ethical Issues

Parents were informed that any of their data used for research purposes would be treated anonymously. They were also informed about the issues of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Written signed consent was given to all participants and nobody objected to signing, and thus their data were all included for analysis.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Biographical data were analysed by using frequencies and percentages. Participants'

responses from the open-ended interview schedules were written down and audio recorded and later coded into themes and sub-themes. Data from pre-test were analysed qualitatively. Post-test data were analysed by means of a t-test for small dependent data to test research hypotheses.

RESULTS

Table 2 indicates that fifteen percent (15%) of parents fell within the interval of 45 years and above. The majority of parents were between 30-34 years of age. This shows that these parents got these adolescent boy and girls while they were at school and they did not have much time to properly nurture or take care of these kids as they were also focusing on their studies. This might have contributed to some of the unacceptable behaviours which were displayed by their adolescent children. All participants were above 30 years. It was also revealed that the educational level of the participants ranged from No Matric, Matric only and Tertiary Level. It is noted that there were a high percentage of parents who had reached tertiary level (45%). The findings of this paper show that twenty-five percent were males and seventy-five were females (Table 2). This may indicate that females, usually, like to commit themselves in activities which will help them in raising up their children, while males may be engaged in employment or otherwise occupied, or may not have as much faith in counselling as a method to improve parenting skills.

Table 2: Biographical data

Criteria	Levels	
<i>Gender</i>		
Males	5	25%
Females	15	75%
<i>Age in Years</i>		
30-34	7	35%
35-39	5	25%
40-44	5	25%
45+	3	10%
<i>Educational Level of Participants</i>		
No Matric	4	20%
Matric Only	7	35%
Tertiary Level	9	45%
<i>Occupation of Participants</i>		
Professionals	10	50%
General workers	6	30%
Self-employed	1	5%
Unemployed	3	15%

Within the sample fifty percent were professionals, thirty percent were general workers, fifteen percent were unemployed and five percent were self-employed. Parents of adolescents were professional (50%). Thirty percent (30%) of parents were general worker, followed by (1%) self and fifteen percent (15%) were unemployed. The area mentioned in this study has challenges of its own due to the university which brings lots of students who rent accommodations within the community and exposed these young growing children to different lifestyle and also acquiring certain behaviours from University students while their parents were studying or working as majority of parents were professionals and working.

Pre-test Results

The following gaps were identified from interviews: lack of communication; parents isolate their children and there is no cohesion with their children; lack of proper anger expression; not providing adolescents with clear instruction and performance expectations; and not involving adolescents in family tasks and also rewarding their involvements. Analysed data from the parenting rating scale indicated that the majority of parents presented to be below average in terms of effectiveness as they scored below 25. Table 3 indicate the pre-test results of parenting rating scale.

Table 3: Pre-test results

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Pre-test</i>
1	20
2	19
3	25
4	14
5	23
6	28
7	16
8	22
9	14
10	16
11	25
12	20
13	17
14	21
15	12
16	15
17	13
18	16
19	21
20	29

Group Sessions

Following the pre-test results, six group sessions were conducted.

Each of the six two hour sessions focused on empowering parents with parenting skills. Home assignments were given after each session. Before the start of the sessions each parent was requested to sign a contract form in order to commit themselves to the group. For the first session, parents' family meetings were introduced as a vehicle for developing good family relationships and discussing family rules. For their home assignment, parents were asked to hold a family meeting with ground rules that allowed everybody at home to speak while others were listening attentively.

In the second session, parents were expected to learn ways to improve parental communication and parent-child relationship and also to learn to use "I" messages. Program sessions aimed to build the basis for improving the quality of the parent-child relationship (emotionally positive and supportive interaction). Session two home assignments included holding a family meeting, discussing family problems and conflict resolutions, rules for building sound relationships.

Session three, emphasised the assertiveness in the form of resistance skills. Parents were expected to improve their communication skills. Parents were taught to coach their children in peer resistance and asked to practice these skills with their adolescents throughout the week.

Constructive anger expression and the practice of self control skills were the focus of session four. During this session, parents learned the importance of avoiding power assertion, and that anger can be destructive if attempting to resolve disagreements with adolescents. Parents practised calming themselves and approaching the conflict in a manner that would build and promote strong adolescent relationships. Parents were expected to show less negativity in parent-adolescent interactions.

In session five, parents were allowed to ask questions, give suggestions and also role-play what they had learned. Parents learned the importance of giving clear task instructions and performance expectations.

In the last session, parents focused on specific ways to involve teenagers in family tasks and to reward that involvement. Parents explored ways to practice warmth and love towards their adolescents. For homework, parents were asked to practice expressing positive feelings

with their children and to improve the emotional quality of parent- child relationship for both fathers and mothers.

After six group sessions, post test evaluation was done. The same parenting rating scale which was used in pre-test was also used for post test. Participants were engaged in data collection and analysis. A t-test for dependant sample was used to analyse this data. The t-test is the most powerful of the related /dependant sample tests and the measurements are made on the interval scale. Table 4 shows the pre-test and post-test results.

Table 4: Post-test results

Participant	Pre-test	Post-test	D	D2
1	20	32	12	144
2	19	21	2	4
3	25	30	5	25
4	14	19	5	25
5	23	26	3	9
6	28	31	3	9
7	16	18	2	4
8	22	32	10	100
9	14	30	16	256
10	16	32	2	64
11	25	27	2	4
12	20	28	3	9
13	17	20	3	9
14	21	31	10	100
15	12	32	2	4
16	15	21	6	36
17	13	30	17	289
18	16	18	2	4
19	21	32	11	121
20	29	30	1	1

$\Sigma D=122$ $\Sigma D^2=1208$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \Sigma D=122 \quad \Sigma D^2=1208 \\
 t_{\text{obt}} &= \frac{\Sigma D \sqrt{n}}{\sqrt{\Sigma D^2 - (\Sigma D)^2 / n}} \\
 &= \frac{122}{\sqrt{(20 \times 1208) - (122)^2}} \\
 &= \frac{122}{\sqrt{24160 - 14884}} \\
 &= \frac{122}{\sqrt{9276}} \\
 &= \frac{122}{96.31} \\
 &= 1.267
 \end{aligned}$$

- level of significance at 0,01
- t-crit = 2,99
- Degree of freedom (df = n-1 = 20-1 = 19)

DISCUSSION

Parent-effectiveness

Parents experienced lectures, role-play and presentations on how to be an effective parent,

maintaining good parent-adolescent relationships, involving adolescents in family tasks and reinforcing that behaviour, respecting the adolescents and involving them in decision making, encouraging their adolescents to be unique and enjoying them. Laursen et al. (2015) believe that discord and relationship deterioration between parents and their adolescent children are a product of the failure of both to negotiate and manage their conflict. Parent also explored ways to express warmth and love towards their adolescents. The participants reported an improvement in parental communication which was defined as a parent's ability to exchange thoughts and ideas in a confident, open manner that promotes conversation.

Parent Effectiveness as Perceived by Parents

It has been asserted with ninety-nine percent confidence that the paper promoted parent-effectiveness of participating parents with adolescents. The results are significant due to factors that really exist. This variable has shown an improvement. This could be due to the fact that the change in parent effectiveness was experienced immediately after sessions as the parents of adolescents went home and practised the skills they have learned or acquired. Parents also had an opportunity to alter their philosophies and learn skills that helped reinforce a change. Schepfeman and Snyder (2002) ascertain that reliable pre-to post-treatment decrements in coercive parent-child interaction, increases in child compliance, and favourable change in parental contingencies which replicate previous correlational (Forgatch 1991; Martinez and Forgatch 2001).

In the parent effectiveness program parents learned about real communication and family interaction. Communication assisted parents with a right way of relating with their children and other people in and outside the home environment, but Brown and Bakken (2011) argue that adolescent can exercise some control over parental knowledge by withholding information to their parents. Parents learned to express themselves, how to treat their children with warmth, love and respect, how to take time out when they were angry for each other and how to handle that situation. During the sessions parents were exposed to this communication content as individuals and as a group. Communication, of

course, is a key intervention in coping with problematic adolescents as well as building and strengthening relationships.

Parents learned that developing strong family relationships and setting clear family expectations can help to protect their children from problems such as substance abuse. Family meetings were introduced to parents, as a vehicle for developing good relationships and discussion of family rules. Parents started holding meetings at homes, and reported them as very powerful tools. Parents also learned the importance of avoiding power assertion, and that anger can be destructive in attempting to resolve disagreement with adolescents.

Group Meetings

The purpose was for the researchers and participants to meet each other, and to enable the participants to list problems and challenges they had with adolescents. The meetings helped to identify problems and select common topics to be discussed or handled in the next five sessions. Every parent signed a contract form in order to commit themselves to the group.

Problems were listed and prioritised and a schedule made of topics to be discussed at each subsequent session. The researchers facilitated the discussion and encouraged interaction and exchanged of information.

The participants hoped to give and to gain support from each other as a group. They believed that the group was what they needed to share their concerns and failures about parent-effectiveness, discipline, and parent-child communication. In a study done by Hair et al. (2008), it has been found that quality relationships with parents mattered for later development even when prior behavioural problems were taken into account. Parents learnt that by developing strong family relationships and setting clear family expectations they could help to protect their adolescents from problems such as drugs or substance abuse. They realised that expressing feeling was of utmost importance, and family meetings at home could create freedom and responsibility. They also believed that they would learn from one another how to be independent and treat their children as unique without comparing them with other teenagers. Parents hoped to acquire more parenting skills. They were willing to support each other, to listen and encour-

age if necessary, and share their strengths. Moreover, they were willing to change their attitudes about things they had done wrong previously. However, Tautolo et al. (2015) argue that more emphasis on parents' relationship should focus on the following factors in order to increase interest in father involvement and fatherhood, including changing societal conceptions of parent, increased maternal employment, shift in demographic profile of modern families, policy debates over the well-being of children. Strategies used in running the parent effectiveness training groups included lectures, homework assignments, role-playing, discussion and issuing of reading materials. At each session, parents chose for themselves topics to present in the next sessions. At each of the six two hour sessions, all parents attended.

CONCLUSION

The participants in the present research committed themselves to starting more groups of the same kind. In that way, they will be transferring the skills and knowledge they learnt from the group.

It is the researchers' hope that this research has made a valuable contribution to health promotion in the South African population. It is hoped that health professionals will be challenged to assist communities in implementing programs that will decrease adolescent problems and stress in both parents and adolescents. This will be done through taking measures that will make individuals in communities better able to control their own lives.

Parents realised that teenagers want freedom, seek independence, and need opportunities in which to mature, but must be given realistic limits beyond which they cannot go. Therefore, being a caring parent, means to find a compromise that is possible in nearly every area of disagreement. Parents saw the need to show their teenagers that they can count on them in bad times as well as in good times, instead of treating each other as enemies. Adolescents have different rights from young children, and their rights are different still from those of their parents. If parents can help adolescents to explore their limits without breaking them, these parents have done the best that any parent can be expected to do. Furthermore, it has been revealed that many parents failed to confront their ado-

lescent children and tell them about what is right and wrong. In the survey, it has been revealed that parents are either too strict with their children or overprotecting of their children, instead of being supportive if necessary and disciplinary if there is a need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the fact that parents' effectiveness improved and promotes effectiveness of the participatory parents, the researchers decided to recommend the following:

- ♦ That more groups of this kind should be run all over the country to promote the mental-health of both parents and adolescents. It is preferable that a group of parents and that group of adolescents should run concurrently, so that both parents and adolescents will discuss important issues that need to be highlighted as family members.
- ♦ Communication need not only be theorised by family members, but it needs to be practiced by both parents and their children at home and other places of interaction in order to build and strengthen the relationships.
- ♦ Parents should receive counselling before their children reach the adolescent stage, as a primary level of prevention.
- ♦ Family meetings should be held every month, to discuss important issues in the family, like budgeting.

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