

Perception of Parents about Their Relationship with Teenage Sons and Daughters

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ABSTRACT The present study investigated parent-child relationship (PCR) from the perspective of the parents of the teenage sons and daughters. Families for the present study were nuclear families from middle and upper-middle class where both parents were at least graduate and were working and had one teenaged son and teenaged daughter between 13-19 years of age. The present study was based on a sample of 400 respondents (100 of each fathers, mothers, sons and daughters). A self constructed socio-demographic questionnaire, Socio-Economic Scale and Parent-Child Relationship Scale were used in the present study. Results revealed that majority of parents perceived their overall relationship with their sons and daughters as good. Parents perceived similar kind of relationship irrespective of the gender of the child. Parents reported high level of acceptance, marital adjustment, realistic role expectations and moderate level of protection, indulgence, utopian expectations, severe moralism and severe discipline for their teenage children. High degree of congruence was found between perception of fathers and mothers across all the dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of an adolescent's relationship with his or her parents is a key component to healthy adolescent development. Family atmosphere is an important factor, which contributes to the parent – child relationship. Family atmosphere may be characterized by the relationships that already exists in it and moreover by status of each family member specially the parents. It has been observed that these family relationships are different for sons and daughters. The parents act is a gender specific manner and the boys and girls are treated differently which leads to development of different self concepts and behaviours of boys and girls. Several studies have also shown that children and parents have overlapping but discrete perceptions of their relationships or of each other's behaviour (Demo et al. 1987; Noller and Callan 1988). Schaefer and Keith (1985) reported that people's thoughts and actions are often based on their definition of a situation.

Similarly, children are influenced by their perceptions of parental attitudes and behaviours or those reported by their parents (Demo et al. 1987). Usually children's descriptions of their mothers' and fathers' parenting behaviors overlap considerably, on the other hand findings also suggest that children might favor mothers or fathers in different parenting behaviors. For example Johnson et al. (1991) in their study revealed that fathers were perceived by 11th graders as more rejecting than mothers. Children themselves are different. They can be of different ages and genders and have varying interests, needs and behaviors. These dissimilarities make differential treatment appropriate on some occasions. When parents treat children differently, the parent-child relationship quality appears to be much more affected by the child's perception of whether the treatment was fair rather than the parent's opinion. Understanding parents' perspectives is critical as mothers and fathers are likely to view their child-rearing behaviors, along with their motivation and goals for these behaviors, in ways that differ substantially from their children.

Keeping this in view present research study was planned with the following objectives

1. To study perception of mothers regarding relationship with their teenage sons and daughters

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2. To study perception of fathers regarding relationship with their teenage sons and daughters
3. To study perceptual differences between mothers and fathers

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Locale: Families for the present study were purposively selected from four zones (zone1, zone2, zone 3 and zone 4) of Ludhiana city as per outlines given by the Municipal Corporation of Ludhiana.

Sample Selection: The study was conducted on 100 nuclear middle and upper- middle class families where both parents were at least graduate and were working and had one teenaged son and teenaged daughter between 13-19 years of age. Families with the history of divorce/remarriage/ chronic illness or mental ailment were not included. The target sample in each family was father, mother, son and daughter. Thus, the present study was based upon a total sample size of 400 respondents (100 of each fathers, mothers, sons and daughters).

A list of government and semi-government organizations such as banks, offices and educational institutions located in these four different zones of Ludhiana was prepared from head offices/concerned departments of the respective institutions. The heads of the respective organizations were approached and objectives, implications and utility of present work were discussed. This helped in getting the necessary co-operation of the authorities in sample selection. So as to get an ideal sample for the study, all the staff members were given self-designed socio-demographic questionnaire and socio-economic status scale to identify socio-personal characteristics and economic status of the families. This was done to identify those employees whose families met the essential criteria for inclusion in the sample. Further from this list middle and upper- middle class nuclear families where selected as per selection criteria set for the present study. The residential addresses of these selected families were collected and zone-wise mapping was done. Necessary care was taken to choose the sample of 100 families proportionally from all the zones and across all the institutions so as to avoid clustering of sample to one particular zone or institution.

Research Instruments: A self constructed socio-demographic questionnaire was used to identify families that fulfilled the inclusion criteria set for the present study. Socio-Economic Scale (Bhardwaj 2001) was used to identify families with middle and upper-middle socio-economic status. Parent- Child Relationship scale by Sharma and Chauhan (2002) was used to assess the quality of parent-child relationship as perceived by parents on eight dichotomous dimensions of parenting viz. Rejection/Acceptance, Carelessness/Overprotection, Negligence/Overindulgence, Strong-realism/Utopian-expectation, Lenient standards/Severe moralism, Total freedom/Severe discipline, Marital conflict/Marital adjustment, Faulty role expectation/Realistic role expectation.

Data Collection: The investigator approached the selected families at their homes. Families were first contacted on phone and suitable time was decided to meet all the respondents of the family at same time, that is father, mother, son and daughter. Before administering various tools, respondents were explained the aim and relevance of the present study and were assured that the information given by them would be kept strictly confidential. The respondents were provided with instruction regarding how to respond to each tool. They were requested to answer objectively and without discussing the responses among themselves, so that information reflects reality. Necessary care was taken not to suggest or give direction or indicate investigator's bias. The tools were answered by all the respondents of the selected families independently in the presence of the investigator.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 depicts parental perception of relationship with their teenage sons and daughters across three levels of parent-child relationship i.e. good, average and poor. Table1 shows that majority of fathers perceived their relationship with their sons (96%) and daughters (96%) as good. Only a few reported their relationship as average with their sons (4%) and daughters (5%). Similar results were obtained for mothers. Majority of mothers like fathers, perceived their relationship as good (96% both for sons and daughters) and only 4 per cent rated their relationship as average, however none of the

Table 1: Percent distribution of parents with regard to overall parent-child relationship perceived by them for their sons and daughters

S. No.	PCR category	PCR perceived by fathers for		PCR perceived by mothers for	
		Sons %	Daughters %	Sons %	Daughters %
1.	Good	96	95	96	96
2.	Average	4	5	4	4
3.	Poor	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Mean scores of overall parent-child relationship perceived by parents for their sons and daughters

S. No.	PCR category	PCR perceived by fathers for		t -value	PCR perceived by mothers for		t -value
		Sons Mean ($\pm$ SD)	Daughters Mean ($\pm$ SD)		Sons Mean ($\pm$ SD)	Daughters Mean ($\pm$ SD)	
1.	Good	7.35($\pm$ 0.91)	7.42($\pm$ 0.94)	0.523	7.40($\pm$ 0.87)	7.46($\pm$ 0.91)	0.467
2.	Average	4.87($\pm$ 0.45)	5.46($\pm$ 0.26)	2.031*	5.25($\pm$ 0.18)	5.30($\pm$ 0.09)	0.497
3.	Poor	0.00	0.00	-	0.00	0.00	-
	Overall	7.24($\pm$ 1.04)	7.29($\pm$ 1.09)	0.332	7.31($\pm$ 0.95)	7.38 $\pm$ 0.99	0.510

* Significant ($p \leq 0.05$)

Table 3: Comparison of mean scores perceived by fathers for their sons and daughters across various dimensions of parent-child relationship

S. No	Dimensions of PCR	Level of dimension	Perception for Sons Mean($\pm$ SD)	Perception for Daughters Mean($\pm$ SD)	t- value
1.	Acceptance	High	8.02($\pm$ 1.78)	8.19($\pm$ 1.66)	0.699
2.	Over protection	Moderate	7.10($\pm$ 1.62)	7.37($\pm$ 1.67)	1.160
3.	Over-indulgence	Moderate	6.50($\pm$ 1.51)	6.53($\pm$ 1.47)	0.142
4.	Utopian-expectation	Moderate	7.05($\pm$ 1.81)	7.03($\pm$ 1.87)	0.077
5.	Severe moralism	Moderate	6.83($\pm$ 1.63)	6.90($\pm$ 1.76)	0.291
6.	Severe discipline	Moderate	6.63($\pm$ 1.63)	6.66($\pm$ 1.80)	0.124
7.	Marital adjustment	High	7.47($\pm$ 1.79)	7.43($\pm$ 1.89)	0.153
8.	Realistic role expectation	High	8.33($\pm$ 1.61)	8.43($\pm$ 1.36)	0.474

fathers or mothers perceived their relationship as poor.

Table 2 shows differences in mean scores of sons and daughters as perceived by their parents. No significant differences were observed in the mean scores of sons and daughters in Good category of PCR. This indicated that mothers and fathers, who perceived their relationship as good, did not differ in their perception. In other words they perceived similar kind of relationship irrespective of the gender of the child. The results contradict the results of Hetherington (1988), Lytton and Rommey (1991) and Russell et al. (1998), who reported that sex of the child does influence the parent-child relationship from the view point of parents as well as the child. Fathers who perceived their relationship as average showed significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) better relationship with their daughters (5.46) as compared with their sons (4.87). In mothers however, no significant difference were noted

which indicated similar kind of relationship of mothers with both sons and daughters. The above findings differ from the findings of Steinberg (1988) who found that at adolescence, intensity of mother-daughter relationship is greater and the father-daughter relationship is least intense. However, in the present study father-daughter relationship has been found equally intense.

Table 3 describes the perception of fathers for their sons and daughters across eight dimensions of parent-child relationship. This reveals that on all the dimensions, fathers had mean value more than 5.5. This indicates that none of the fathers fell in the category of rejection, carelessness, negligence, strong realism, lenient standards, total freedom, marital conflict and faulty role expectation dimension. The mean scores indicated inclination towards high level of acceptance, marital adjustment and realistic role expectations and moderate level of

protection, indulgence, utopian expectations, severe moralism and severe discipline. Analysis of mean values across different dimensions of parent-child relationship for sons and daughters showed no significant gender differences in perception of fathers across eight dimensions of PCR. Fathers perceived their relationship quite similar for their teenage sons and daughters.

This table further depicts that highest mean scores were obtained for realistic role expectations both for sons (8.33) and daughters (8.43) and the lowest were obtained for over-indulgence (6.50 for sons and 6.53 for daughters). It, therefore, could be concluded that fathers perceived themselves as realistic role models for their teenagers to follow and showed least importance to indulging behaviour.

Mothers' perception of their relationship with their sons and daughters across various dimensions is given in Table 4. Alike fathers mean scores on various dimensions indicated perceived high level of acceptance, realistic role expectation and marital relations and moderate levels of over-protection, over-indulgence, utopian-expectations, severe moralism and severe discipline.

The highest mean scores were obtained for realistic role expectations for both sons (8.36) and daughters (8.37), whereas the least were observed for severe discipline in sons (6.44) and over-indulgence in daughters (6.56). This indicates that mothers were less concerned about disciplining their sons while for daughters they remained less indulging i.e. they did not intend to give high degree of autonomy to their daughters and did not use passive means to discipline them.

No gender differences were noticed in perception of mothers for eight dimensions of parent-child relationship studied. Mothers had perceived similar relationship with their sons and daughters across all the dimensions. It therefore, may be concluded that sex of the child had negligible role to play as far as perception of mothers is concerned.

Table 5 depicts perceptual differences between mothers and fathers about relationship with their teenage sons and daughters. The mean values of all the dimensions indicated perceptual similarity between parents on various dimensions of parenting. The non-significant differences in all the dimensions further support the fact that

Table 4: Comparison of mean scores perceived by mothers for their sons and daughters across various dimensions of parent-child relationship

S. No.	Dimensions of PCR	Level of dimension	Perception for Son	Perception for Daughter	t- value
			Mean($\pm$ SD)	Mean($\pm$ SD)	
1.	Acceptance	High	8.01($\pm$ 1.66)	8.10($\pm$ 1.62)	0.388
2.	Over protection	Moderate	7.29($\pm$ 1.71)	7.45($\pm$ 1.75)	0.655
3.	Over-indulgence	Moderate	6.50($\pm$ 1.70)	6.56($\pm$ 1.68)	0.251
4.	Utopian-expectation	Moderate	7.22($\pm$ 1.52)	7.42($\pm$ 1.58)	0.911
5.	Severe moralism	Moderate	6.84($\pm$ 1.56)	6.89($\pm$ 1.62)	0.222
6.	Severe discipline	Moderate	6.44($\pm$ 1.65)	6.64($\pm$ 1.76)	0.829
7.	Marital adjustment	High	7.64($\pm$ 1.52)	7.60($\pm$ 1.56)	0.183
8.	Realistic role expectation	High	8.36($\pm$ 1.45)	8.37($\pm$ 1.46)	0.049

Table 5: Comparison of mean scores perceived by fathers and mothers for their sons and daughters across various dimensions of parent-child relationship

S. No.	PCR Dimension	PCR perceived for son by		t-value	PCR perceived for daughter by		t-value
		Father	Mother		Father	Mother	
		Mean($\pm$ SD)	Mean($\pm$ SD)		Mean($\pm$ SD)	Mean($\pm$ SD)	
1.	Acceptance	8.02($\pm$ 1.78)	8.01($\pm$ 1.66)	0.041	8.19($\pm$ 1.66)	8.10($\pm$ 1.62)	0.388
2.	Over protection	7.10($\pm$ 1.62)	7.29($\pm$ 1.71)	0.806	7.37($\pm$ 1.67)	7.45($\pm$ 1.75)	0.331
3.	Over-indulgence	6.50($\pm$ 1.51)	6.50($\pm$ 1.70)	0.000	6.53($\pm$ 1.47)	6.56($\pm$ 1.68)	0.134
4.	Utopian-expectation	7.05($\pm$ 1.81)	7.22($\pm$ 1.52)	0.719	7.03($\pm$ 1.87)	7.42($\pm$ 1.58)	1.590
5.	Severe moralism	6.83($\pm$ 1.63)	6.84($\pm$ 1.56)	0.044	6.90($\pm$ 1.76)	6.89($\pm$ 1.62)	0.042
6.	Severe discipline	6.63($\pm$ 1.63)	6.44($\pm$ 1.65)	0.818	6.66($\pm$ 1.80)	6.64($\pm$ 1.76)	0.080
7.	Marital adjustment	7.47($\pm$ 1.79)	7.64($\pm$ 1.52)	0.723	7.43($\pm$ 1.89)	7.60($\pm$ 1.56)	0.693
8.	Realistic role expectation	8.33($\pm$ 1.61)	8.36($\pm$ 1.45)	0.138	8.43($\pm$ 1.36)	8.37($\pm$ 1.46)	0.301

mothers and fathers, irrespective of the sex of the child, perceived almost same kind of relationship. This indicates high degree of congruence between father and mother on various parenting dimensions. Higher mean value for realistic role expectations indicates their emotional stability, ability to handle conflicts successfully and consistency in their behaviour. It may be concluded that parents share similar attitudes, beliefs and values as they belong to same generation and have similar goals for their children, therefore, parents showed congruence in their perception. Congruent parental behaviours can be seen as reflecting a positive family environment. It is important to mention findings of Deal et al. (1989) who found that high congruence between mothers' and fathers' behaviour was associated with positive parent-child interactions, open communication and de-emphasis of authoritarianism.

CONCLUSION

Majority of fathers and mothers perceived their overall relationship with their sons and daughters as good. Parents perceived similar kind of relationship irrespective of the gender of the child. Both fathers and mothers perceived similar relationship with their sons and daughters across all the dimensions. High degree of congruence was found between perception of fathers and mothers across all the dimensions.

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