

Internalizing Problems of Adolescence in the Context of Parent and Peer Attachment

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Abstract

The study aimed to assess the internalizing problems of adolescence in the context of parent and peer attachment. The sample (N=602) was collected from adolescents from different schools and colleges in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Multan. The participants completed the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment by Armsden and Greenberg (1987) and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). Insecure parental and peer attachment during adolescence was associated with more internalizing problems than secure parental and peer attachment throughout adolescence. In terms of communication, trust, and alienation, both peer and parent-based secure attachment have high scores. Girls experience greater stress than boys, according to gender difference studies. Compared to boys, girls form stronger bonds with their peers.

Keywords: Parent and Peer Attachment, Internalizing Problems, Gender Differences.

Adolescence has been considered a period of crisis and confusion. The challenges adolescents have to meet due to the transition from childhood are biological, social, and psychological changes (Crockett & Peterson, 1993). The storm and stress adolescents experience feature mood disturbance, and parent-child conflict and it is characterized significantly in teenage years (Arnett, 1999; Hines & Paulson, 2006). There is a chance that adolescents will encounter little or severe pressures daily due to their increasing independence and exploratory nature during adolescence (Ge, Lorenz, Conger, Elder, & Simons, 1994). Adolescence, with all its challenges, is linked to a considerable rise in psychiatric disorders, particularly anxiety and depression, so this shouldn't come as a surprise (Ge, Lorenz, Conger, Elder, & Simons, 1994).

Adolescence's life undergoes significant changes during the vulnerable period of adolescence. Historically seen as an emotional minefield, but appears improbable (Coleman, 1993; Steinberg, 2001). Adolescents must nevertheless overcome the anxiety of obstacles that are crucial to their growth. Finding the connection with their parents and peers that they had before puberty is pivotal. Their relationship with their parents is the key to helping them solve these issues (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000).

Internalizing problem is characterized as mood and emotional disturbances and it incorporates anxiety and depression (Kovac & Devlin, 1998). Internalizing problems (such as anxiety, depression, and stress) is crippling and upsetting and it affects many young people (Bell, Strauss, 1990; Feldman, Ortega, Koinis-Mitchell, Kuo, & Canino, 2010).

Teenagers who exhibit evidence of internalizing issues run the risk of having negative outcomes, such as trouble forming close friendships with their peers, a lack of social skills, and bad teacher-student connections. (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008). Attachment patterns with close connections can be used to predict the existence of anxiety and depressive symptoms. For instance, depression in adolescence is predicted by early childhood insecure attachment to parents. (Yi Jinyao M.D, 2012)

The term 'attachment' refers to the strong psychological connection between individuals (Bowlby, 1958). Another way to describe it is as "the emotional ties that bind members together despite time and space (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969). Goldberg (2000) defined attachment as a relationship that provides care and protection. There are three elements of Attachment, which can make a relationship secure and strong. Among them, the first one is trusting the relationship. Trust is the degree of mutual understanding and respect given to each other from the caregiver to the receiver and vice versa (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Another one is Communication. It is the level of spoken interaction between the person and the caregiver. For good-quality attachment, the element of communication should be more (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). The third element in secure relations is Alienation. It is the anger and interpersonal distance between the caregiver and the receiver. The attachment increases with the decrease of alienation (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

Major biological, psychological, and social challenges and opportunities characterize the progression from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. (Dahl & Gunnar, 2009). As developmental pathways are set in motion at this point, the interplay between the environment and the individual is highly stressful. Most teenagers can manage conditions and challenges during adolescence without developing any mental health issues, but those who cannot cope experience them. Youth was characterized by serious health issues by Bijl & Ravelli (2000).

Additionally, opportunities to establish personal and professional connections are formed during this crucial time,

and if a person is distracted and struggling with mental health issues, they may miss the opportunities and pay the price for the rest of their lives (Kessler & Forthofer, 1999). According to research, psychological issues in adults have their roots in adolescence (Fergusson, Horwood, Ridder & Beautrais, 2005). The study by LeCroy, Barnes & Farrel (1988) demonstrated that teenagers who have positive, supportive ties with their parents behave more responsibly. On the other hand, poor behaviour is linked to less affectionate and close relationships with parents (Raja, McGee & Stanton, 1992).

The studies mentioned above do not differentiate between types of problem behaviour. There are two categories of behaviour problems: Internalizing problems (depression, Anxiety, stress) and externalizing problems (violence and criminality). Problem behaviours that are both internalizing and externalizing increase in frequency during adolescence. Since covert behaviour can go unnoticed and be crippling, this study will concentrate on the issue of internalizing behaviour problems (Moffitt, 1993).

Adolescence with secure attachment is an internalized model of positivity which means that when he/she is securely attached, adolescence sees himself/herself as worthy of love and affection. He/she also makes positive models of others which means that they perceive others i.e. peers and parents and interact with them positively. A relationship that is based on secure attachment is conceptualized as low on anxiety and avoidance. Adolescents with insecure attachment have a positive perception of others and a negative perception of themselves (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). They are extremely sensitive to rejection and they are anxious, others are viewed by them as unreliable. They suppress their feelings to spare themselves the anger and suffering brought on by perceived rejection (Raja, McGee & Stanton, 1992). Based on the evidence poor quality attachment is associated with the belief that one is unwanted. We can conclude that internalizing problems and attachment have a negative relationship. Empirical research backs up the notion that high levels of anxiety and depression might result from poor parental bonding and anxiety (Laible, Carlo & Raffaelli, 2000).

Adolescents who have strong family ties are better able to handle the stresses of daily life (Friedmann, McDermut, Solomon, Ryan, Keitner & Miller, 1997). According to certain theories, attachment has a significant impact on an adolescent's psychological well-being. The degree of attachment to one's parent was a strong predictor of well-being and reduced stress. According to the research, families of adolescents with internalizing problems have less communication among them and they are less likely to engage actively (Keitner, Ryan, Miller, Kohn, Bishop & Epstein, 1995).

The parent-child relationship has been transcended in adolescent literature. It emphasizes, for instance, a different relationship. Other relationships than the parent-child relationship like peer and intimate relationships have been studied by Hazen and Shaver (1987) and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). They claimed that interactions with classmates in school can be influenced by early attachments to parents. (Fraleigh & Shaver, 2000)

Peer attachment is another area of interest in current studies. According to research, healthy peer interactions are essential to adolescent psychological development and are crucial for adjustment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Batgos & Leadbetter, 1994).

Family and peer connections are one of the elements that predict internalizing problems in kids and teenagers. Depression

and anxiety are the two main internalizing problems that adolescents experience (Sawyer, 2001). Undiagnosed depression and anxiety are present in youngsters, and this emotional issue is not being appropriately addressed. When distress reaches this level, it needs to be addressed and treated. (Spence, 2001).

Male and female close relationship interactions are different. In a relationship, men tend to desire independence in relationships, but females prefer to connect and be emotionally dependent on their partners (Cross & Madson, 1997). Studies comparing boys and girls revealed that girls have more secure or strong peer attachments than boys do (Fornell, 1992). According to research on peer attachment, all genders have an equal number of peers, but the quality of attachment with peers varies (Fornell, 1992). Similar findings from other studies indicate girls have a more secure bond with their peers than boys do (Gorrese & Ruggeri, 2012).

In light of the above literature, the present research attempts to understand adolescent's attachment to parents and their internalizing behaviour problems. The present research also aims to assess adolescents' attachment to peers and their internalizing behaviour problems. Moreover, it assesses gender differences in internalizing behaviour problems and parent and peer attachment in adolescence. The research hypotheses are formulated based on previous research.

1. Adolescents with secure attachment with parents exhibit significantly less internalizing behaviour problems than those who have insecure attachment.
2. Adolescents with secure attachment with peers exhibit significantly fewer internalizing behaviour problems than those who have insecure peer attachment.
3. Adolescents with a secure parental attachment will show significantly higher scores on communication and trust and low scores on alienation.
4. Adolescents with a secure peer attachment will show significantly higher scores on communication and trust and low on alienation.
5. Girls will show significantly higher scores on secure peer attachment as compared to boys.

Methodology

Research design

The correlational research design was used in this research to identify the relationship between internalizing problems and parent and peer attachment.

Sample

The sampling technique used for this study was purposive sampling. This representative technique was selected because the target population was available in educational institutions. The inclusion criteria were 13 to 19 years, adolescents which were available in schools, colleges, and universities. The smallest sample from the population collected was 602 of which 419 were girls and 168 were boys. The sample included students from different schools, colleges, and universities of Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Multan. Students of 8th, 9th, and 10th grade provided the data. Their age range was 13 years to 15 years. The data gathered from students in colleges were of 11th and 12th grade. Their age range was 16 years to 17 years. The data from students in the university were taken from the BS 1st semester. Their age range was 18 to 19 years. Both Private and

Government schools and colleges were considered for data collection.

Instruments

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)

Armsden & Greenberg created IPPA. It was a self-report instrument. It uses a point Likert scale as the framework for responses. The response statement was from 1 (almost never), 2 (Not very often), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often true), 5 (almost always true). The statements were about the perceived attachment of mother, father, and peer. 28 items for parents and 25 items for peers made up the original version. There are 25 items in each mother, father, and peer portion of the updated version that was employed in current studies, yielding three scores. The degree of mutual trust; quality of communication; and extent of anger and alienation were evaluated as three broad aspects. In Each portion of IPPA i.e. mother and father, and peer 3 subscales are present. Trust has 10 items, communication has 9 items and alienations has 6 items. By summing the score of each subscale, we get the score. Now by comparing the results of three subscales (trust, communication, and alienation), we can determine which subscale is higher or lower than the other. IPPA was scored by reverse scoring the negatively worded item

and then summing the response value. The alpha reliability of IPPA was .93.

Depression, Anxiety, Stress (DASS)

DASS 21 was developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995). It was a self-reported questionnaire created to gauge the intensity of common depression and anxiety symptoms. The subject had to check if a symptom had occurred in the preceding week when completing the DASS. Each item was scored from 0 (did not apply to me at all over the last week), 1 (applied to me to some degree), 2 (applied to me to a considerable degree), 3 (applied to me very much or most of the time over the past week). The alpha reliability was .93.

Procedure

Firstly, ethical approval was sought from the board of studies of the Department of Psychology, International Islamic University. Then, for the present study, permission was taken from the Principals of schools colleges, and Universities in Islamabad and Multan. After obtaining informed consent from the participants, a questionnaire booklet was given. The booklet comprised of Demographic Information Sheet, an Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment and Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale. The data were collected and help was provided during the process. The data collected was processed through SPSS for analysis

Table 1

Results of Independent sample t-test showing Means, standard deviation, and t-value of secure and insecure parental attachment and internalizing problems (N=602)

Scale	Secure Attachment (317)		Insecure attachment (285)		t(602)	p	95%CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Depression	13.9	4.06	15.1	3.6	3.8	.00**	.60	1.8	-0.31
Anxiety	13.8	3.4	14.6	3.9	2.5	.01**	.19	.13	-0.21
Stress	15.3	4.0	15.6	4.27	.79	.42	-.39	.93	-0.07
DASS	43.1	9.8	45.4	10.0	2.8	.00**	.68	3.8	-0.23

Note: CI=Confidence Interval, LL=lower limit, UL=upper limit

*p<.05, df=600, N=602

Table 1 displays the mean, standard deviation, and t value of the DASS for both secure and insecure parental attachment. The findings indicated that adolescents with secure parental attachment were significantly lower in depression, anxiety, and overall DASS scores. Whereas, there was no significant relation

between adolescents with secure and insecure parental attachment on stress. It indicated that adolescents who have secure parental attachment had less depression and anxiety. In Pakistan, the family system is strong. Parents take care of their children and provide security. Hence, lower depression and anxiety. (Brenan, 2006).

Table2

Results of Independent sample t-test showing Means, standard deviation, and t-value of secure and insecure peer attachment and internalizing problems (N=602)

Scale	Secure Attachment (324)		Insecure attachment (278)		t (602)	p	95%CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Depression	14.1	3.90	14.9	3.70	2.53	.01**	.18	1.4	-0.34
Anxiety	13.6	3.60	14.9	3.70	4.07	.00**	.63	1.8	-0.35
Stress	14.9	4.11	16.0	4.17	3.17	.00**	.40	1.74	-0.26
DASS	42.7	9.78	45.8	9.98	3.8	.00**	.68	3.8	-0.31

Note: CI=Confidence Interval, LL=lower limit, UL=upper limit, *p<.05, df=600, N=602

Table 2 displays the mean, standard deviation, and t value of DASS on secure and insecure peer attachment. The findings indicated that adolescents with secure peer attachment were significantly lower on depression, anxiety, stress, and DASS overall scores as compared to adolescents with insecure peer attachment. It indicated that adolescents who had a secure peer

attachment were low on internalizing problems. Secure attachment means good bonding with parents. Securely attached parents are emotionally available to their children. Overall internalizing problems (depression, anxiety, and stress) are lower in securely attached adolescence.

Table 3

Results of Independent t-test showing Means, standard deviation, and t-value of communication, trust, alienation on secure and insecure parent attachment (N=602)

Scale	Secure Attachment (324)		Insecure attachment (278)		t (602)	p	95%CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Trust	83.8	65.1	67.2	8.55	-26.9	.00**	-17.7	-15.3	0.35
Communication	72.7	7.12	58.9	6.72	-24.3	.00**	-14.8	-12.6	1.99
Alienation	49.2	4.64	52.0	3.93	-8.13	.00**	-3.55	-2.18	-0.655

Note: CI=Confidence Interval, LL=lower limit, UL=upper limit, *p<.05,df=600, N=602

The table displayed the mean, standard deviation, and t value of communication, trust, and alienation on parent secure and insecure attachment. The findings indicated that adolescents with secure parent attachment were significantly higher on trust and communication as compared to adolescents with insecure parent attachment. The basis of secure attachment is a high score on trust and communication and a low score on alienation

(Bowlby, 1989). This study supported the work of Vivian (2000). She computed from her study that high communication, high trust, and low alienation were an element of secure attachments. So it can be inferred that adolescents had secure parental attachment as stated by Bowlby (1989). It indicated that the adolescents showed secure peer attachment.

Table 4

Results of Independent T-test showing Means, standard deviation, and t-value of communication, trust, alienation on secure and insecure peer attachment (N=602)

Scale	Secure Attachment (324)		Insecure attachment (278)		t(602)	p	95%CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Trust	45.2	4.22	34.1	6.21	-25.8	.00**	-11.9	-10.2	2.09
Communication	32.7	4.25	24.9	4.06	-22.9	.00**	-8.49	-7.15	1.87
Alienation	30.6	2.63	27.4	3.93	-14.2	.00**	-3.63	-2.74	0.95

Note: CI=Confidence Interval, LL=lower limit, UL=upper limit, *p<.05,df=600, N=602

Table 4 shows the mean, standard deviation, and t value of communication, trust, and alienation. The findings revealed that trust and communication scored high on adolescents with secure peer attachment as compared to adolescents with insecure peer attachment. Whereas, alienation scored more on adolescents

with insecure peer attachment as compared to adolescents with secure peer attachment. It indicated that secure attachment had high scores on trust and communication and low scores on alienation.

Table 5

Result of Independent t-test showing Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Mother, Father, and Peer Attachment on males and females (N=602)

	Boys		Girls				95% CI		Cohen's
	(168)		(419)						
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	t(602)	p	LL	UL	d
PT	38.2	7.81	40.9	7.34	-.14	.00**	-3.9	-2.0	-0.35
PC	27.0	5.53	30.10	5.53	-6.1	.00**	-3.8	-1.3	5.98
PA	29.0	3.10	29.0	3.10	-.58	.55	-.71	-.38	1.25
MT	35.2	6.1	36.40	5.48	-2.4	.01**	-2.2	-2.5	-0.2
MC	33.0	5.0	34.50	5.50	5.4	.00**	-2.3	-5.0	-0.28
MA	25.1	2.40	25.60	2.70	-1.9	.04**	-.93	-1.00	-0.19
FT	39.3	6.20	40.0	7.40	-1.0	.28	-1.9	.56	-0.10
FC	31.9	5.3	32.2	6.30	-1.1	.62	-1.3	.79	-0.05
FA	25.1	5.30	25.2	5.30	-.40	.88	-.50	.43	- 0.05

Note: CI= Confidence interval, LL lower limit, UL Upper limit, **p<0.01, PT= Peer trust, PC=Peer communication, PA = Peer Alienation, MT= Mother trust, MC= Mother communication, MA = Mother Alienation, FT = Father Trust, FC= Father Communication, FA=Father alienation

Table 5 shows the attachment and alienation of boys and girls from their mothers, fathers, and peers. The results showed that the attachment to the mother, father, and peers of the girls was higher as compared to boys. The girls' peer trust (M = 40.9) score was significantly higher as compared to boys (38.2). The girl's peer communication score (M= 30.1) was higher as compared to boys (M= 27.0). It showed that peer attachment of the girls was higher as compared to boys. Girls were more securely attached as compared to boys as their means of peer trust and communication. Other research showed similar results which indicate that the secure attachment of females with peers is more as compared to boys (Gorrese & Ruggeri, 2012). Adolescent girls in the province of Punjab are more attached to peers than boys. This is because girls are more inherently directed towards making strong interpersonal relations (Brenan, 2006).

Discussion

SPSS, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, was used to analyze the findings. The findings indicate that adolescents with secure parental attachment had fewer internalizing problems (depression, anxiety, and stress) as compared to adolescents with insecure parental attachment. Adolescents with secure attachment with parents exhibit less internalizing behavior problems than those with insecure attachment. The present findings were supported by the work of Raja, McGee, and Stanton (1992) and Laible, Carlo, and Rafaelli (2000) who reported that insecure attachment can lead to anxiety and depression (internalizing problems). The score is significant because secure attachments have a pattern that includes high trust and communication and low alienation. Bowlby, J. (1982). This pattern of trust and communication helps adolescents to be open to their parents if they have any problems so that parents and adolescents can together work on their problems. Hence, less anxiety and depression.

Moreover, another finding showed that adolescents with secure peer attachment exhibit less internalizing problems as

compared to those with insecure peer attachment. Adolescents with secure peer attachment, exhibit less internalizing behaviour problems (anxiety and depression) than those who have insecure attachment. The study was consistent with previous studies by Bowlby (1982). Bowlby stated that the ability to find proximity is innate. The child's proximity behaviours are necessary for survival. Therefore, the type of attachment matters. Secure attachment with peers helps survive in the outer world. Hence, secure attachment decreases the likelihood of depression and anxiety Bowlby (1982). Furthermore, he stated that the lack of secure attachment with parents and peers can instigate a feeling of being unloved which can lead to depression (internalizing problem). On the contrary, secure attachment between parents and children in early childhood leads to confident adolescents who are more open and feel secure in their later lives. They can easily bond with others e.g. peers. Bowlby (1982).

Another finding demonstrated that adolescents with strong parental connections had good levels of trust and communication with their parents. This study has elaborated the research findings by breaking down secure attachment into three elements i.e. Trust, communication, and alienation. Each element is studied individually. Furthermore, Alienation, Trust, and Communication are studied with peers, and results were found for peer attachment, which stated that adolescents with secure peer attachment will show higher scores on communication and trust and lower scores on alienation. This study supported the work of Vivona (2000). She computed from her study that high communication, high trust, and low alienation were an element of secure attachments. On the other hand, less trust, less communication, and high alienation were the dimensions of insecure attachment. Vivona (2000)

It can be inferred from all the findings above that Pakistani adolescents had a secure parent and peer attachment. They had better social support and they were surrounded by a secure environment. One more interesting gender-based finding from the study indicates that females are strongly connected to peers as compared to males. Other research showed similar results which indicate that the secure attachment of females with peers

is more as compared to boys (Gorrese & Ruggieri, 2012). Adolescent girls in the province of Punjab are more attached to peers than boys. This is because girls are more inherently directed towards making strong interpersonal relations (Brenan, 2006).

Limitations and Recommendations

The present research was conducted on the sample that was collected from two major cities of Punjab i.e. Rawalpindi and Multan. It covers only two cities of Punjab, whereas Punjab is a huge province and to generalize the research results, samples from other cities of Punjab should be collected. Therefore, it is recommended to include the maximum number of cities.

Implications

Many types of research have focused on internalizing behavior problems of adolescents and their attachment to parents and peers. Internalizing behavior problems is a broad term for depression and anxiety that can be caused by any event in life, it can be as simple as separation anxiety. In this research, we have focused on parent and peer attachment and how different types of attachment can lessen or magnify the effect of an internalizing behavior problem. The present research identifies that secure parent and peer attachment can lessen the effect of internalizing problems, thus decreasing the probability of depression and anxiety in adolescents. Steps should be taken to aware parents and teachers to educate and practice secure attachment. Counseling centers should be created in the community and schools for awareness among parents and teachers. These measures will help in reducing psychological problems ie anxiety and depression.

Conclusion

Adolescents' internalizing problems have been examined regarding peer and parent attachment in this article. Moreover, gender differences based on secure or insecure attachment were also studied. It has been found that those adolescents who have secure parent and peer attachment have fewer internalizing problems as compared to insecure adolescents. Other research indicated that, in contrast to adolescents with insecure parent and peer attachment, those with secure parent and peer attachment had high levels of trust and communication and low levels of alienation. Moreover, the gender difference shows that girls generally are more easily stressed compared to boys. But in peer relationships, girls are more securely attached as compared to boys.

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