

Exploring Origins of Parent-Child Relational Problems among Pakistani Parents: A Qualitative Study

Sumaya Batool¹, Alay Ahmed², Shazia Khalid³, & Shazia Ashraf⁴

¹Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha

²Department of Psychology, Preston University-Kohat, Peshawar Campus

³ & ⁴Department of Psychology, Preston University-Kohat, Islamabad Campus

Abstract

Parent-child relationships are corner stones of personality development and functioning of individuals both at personal and social level. Problematic relationships can cause clinically significant impairment and dysfunctioning. Aim of the present study was to explore the causes and management of parent-child relational problems in parents of Punjab, Pakistan. Sample of the study included ($N = 20$) parents who were already screened out from normal population of cities of Punjab, Pakistan. Sample was further divided into good parents ($n = 10$) and problematic parents ($n = 10$). A semi-structured interview protocol was used to explore causes and management patterns of parent-child relational problems in both good and problematic parents. Results of the content analysis revealed that parent-child relational problems are linked with children's behavioral issues regarding academics, domestic chores and social and family relations. Results also explored that good parents use more positive and constructive strategies to deal with these conflicts while problematic parents use more negative management strategies. These results can help education and family counselors to help parents and teachers to train and guide parents to improve their relations with children and ultimately make their children grow as more efficient member of society.

Keywords: Parent-child relationship, conflicts, conflict management, behavioral control

Introduction

Parent-child relationship is an extremely important component in the formation of personality and socialization of a child from the beginning to childhood and adolescence (Meng-Yuqun, 1998). Parent-child positive relationship delivers the basis for children's learning. Children develop the skills they need to achieve success in life with parent's delicate, quick and expectable care. Parent-child early relationships have strong effect on emotional well-being of child (Dawson, & Ashman, 2000), their simple abilities of coping and solving problem, and future capacity of relationships (Lerner, Rothbaum, Boulos, & Castellino, 2002). Through these collaborations, children pick up the skills they need to participate with others and to prosper in different environment (Rogoff, 2003). They learn how to create strong relationships with adults and peers. They learn how to modify to new situations and to solve clash.

To create a safe and healthy environment is another basic step to raising a positive parent child-relationship (Lester, Andreozzi, & Appiah, 2004). In different families, positive parent-child interaction has different dimensions. Healthy child development is linked with lively communications, caregiving patterns and emotional bonding. Different parents respond differently to their children's needs, depending upon their own temperament, social and personal situations, past personal history and cultural values and beliefs (Small, 1998). Gender differences also exist in parenting patterns and parent-child interactions. Mothers and fathers influence and respond their children's physical and psychological needs differently (Cook, Roggman, & Boyce, 2011).

There are so many factors which turn out to be major cause of parent-child relational problems. Parent's expectation related to children's behavior in specific situations like home, school, social gatherings. Their academic performance, emotional reactions, responsibilities, money management and relationship with family members. On the other side children think that their parents are taking away their freedom, they are interfering in their privacy, they do not understand their needs and feelings and are authoritative. Other important factors are communication gap and personality differences. But whatever is the reason behind these relational problems one thing is obvious that frequency and intensity conflicts depends solely on ways of parenting. Conflicts are natural but the way parents manage conflicts with their child really matters (Kelly & Emery, 2003) positive relationship conflict management turns out to be healthy family interactions and develop healthy personalities of children but poor or negative conflict management develop disruptive personalities of children, pathological family environment and ultimately distended families (Montemayor, 1986).

Research Questions: 1. What would be the causes of parent child relational problems regarding children's behavior among good and problematic parents? 2. How do good and problematic parents manage problems in their relationship with children?

Rationale of the Study

We are living in a society in which family systems are transforming rapidly. This transition is putting a significant impact on parenting patterns and parent child relationships. Many other factors like socio-economic and demographic changes contribute in developing unhealthy parent child relationships. Therefore, it seems essential to explore relevant aspects of parent child relational problems so that specific interventions could be formulated.

Researches have explored that poverty influences children's growth, parent-child relations, and family functioning. When families lack resources, and live with more instability, the risk of child behavioral problems is higher. On the other hand, lack of parenting skills, increase of stress, feelings of inferiority and poor conflict management also contribute to parent child relational problems (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Trommsdorf, 2003; Hess, Teti, & Hussey-Gardner, 2004). Most of the research work focusing these issues has been done in western culture but in Pakistan there is a dire need to explore causes and management of parent child relational problems to investigate healthy child rearing patterns (Ayoub, et al., 2011; Ayoub, Vallotton, & Mastergeorge, 2011).

Method

Objectives

The main objectives of the study included exploring causes and management of parent-child relational problems in good and problematic parents.

Research Design

Exploratory research design was used in the study.

Assessment Measure

To explore the causes and management of parent child relational problems in parents' perspective a structured open-ended interview protocol was developed. Interview protocol was based upon the questions related to characteristics and behaviors of the children which cause problems in their relationship with parents and different strategies which parents use to manage these relationship issues. It also focused on exploring other causal factors which play significant role in parent child relational problems.

Participants

Sample of the study was ($N = 20$) parents from normal population. Sample was selected from the screened-out cases using Parent Child Relationship Inventory (Gerard, 1994). Sample was further divided into parents having good relationship with children ($n = 10$) and parents having relational problems with children ($n = 10$). Age range of the parents was 29 to 56 years with ($M = 41.2$, $S.D = 4.67$)

Procedure

To explore the causes and management of parent child relational problems identified parents who were having very good relationship with their children and parents having problems in their relationship with children were approached personally. After approval from school authorities, a telephonic consent was taken and they were requested to come respective schools of their children on stipulated time. All participants were called for individual interviews to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Participants were briefed about nature and purpose of research and a written informed consent was taken after ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Average time taken for each participant was between 40-45minutes. Participants were encouraged to give a detailed and real information about their perceptions and experiences. At the end they were thanked for their cooperation and participation.

Results

Table 1

Frequencies of categories of analysis regarding causes of parent child relational problems in good parents (N = 10)

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total f
Misbehavior	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3
Disobedience	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	5
Wasting Time	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	5
Making Noise	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
Bossiness	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Non-compliance	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
Choosy	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	5
Lack of Sociability	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Jilt	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Carelessness	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	6

Table 1 demonstrates the frequencies of the categories, for good parents, associated to the causes accounted for parent child relational problem. Carelessness was found to be dominant category as compared to others, whereas disobedience, wasting time and choosy were second dominant categories as illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 2

Frequencies of categories of analysis regarding causes of parent child relational problems in problematic parents (N = 10)

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total f
Misbehavior	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	08
Disobedience	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Wasting Time	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	08
Low Achievement	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	04
Non-compliance	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	09
Irritable Behavior	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	05
Jealousy	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	04
Quarrelling	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	07
Obstinate	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	08
Abusive	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	06
Carelessness	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	08
Inferiority Complex	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	03
Sluggish	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	04

Table 2 reveals the frequencies of the categories, for problematic parents, linked to the causes accounted for parent child relational problem. Disobedience and non-compliance were found to be the first and second dominant categories respectively.

Table 3

Frequencies of categories of analysis regarding management of parent child relational problems in good parents (N = 10)

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total f
Punishment	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	07
Reinforcement	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	07
Persuasion	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	09
Explaining Facts	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Annoying	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	07
Ignoring	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Warmth & Affection	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Playing	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	09
Goal Setting	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Moral Education	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	08

Table 3 depicts the frequencies of the categories, for good parents, accompanying to the causes accounted for analysis regarding management of parent child relational problem. Explaining facts, ignoring, warmth & affection, and goal setting were most prevalent ones, whereas persuasion and playing were found to be the second dominant categories.

Table 4

Frequencies of categories of analysis regarding management of parent child relational problems in problematic parents (N = 10)

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total f
Punishment	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Snubbing	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Humiliating	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	05
Isolating	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	03
Annoying	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Fulfilling Demands	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	06
Being Coercive	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	06

Table 4 represents the frequencies of the categories, for problematic parents, associated with the causes accounted for analysis regarding management of parent child relational problem. Punishment, snubbing, and annoying were most prevalent all categories, while fulfilling demands and being coercive were found to be on second number as dominant categories.

Discussion

Purpose of the present study was to explore the causes of parent child relational problems identified by parents regarding children's behavior patterns. Furthermore, current research was aimed at exploring the behavior modification strategies which both problematic and good parents use in controlling their children's behavior. Results have revealed that carelessness, disobedience, wasting time and being choosy were dominant issues which good parents face and which ultimately develop parent child relational issues. On the other hand, problematic parents reported more serious concern related to their children's behavior. Disobedience, misconduct, Non-compliance, carelessness and obstinate behavior were top complaints which cause problems in their relationship with children (Liu et al., 2005; Renk, Liljequist, Simpson, & Phares, 2005).

Many researches were conducted to study the causes of conflicts between parents and their children (but unfortunately most of the researches conducted on Asian sample were related to Chinese and almost rare documentation is available regarding Pakistani parents. Chao and Tseng (2002) reported that parent child and parent adolescent conflicts are mostly caused because of children's routine behaviors which are not accepted by parents. Mostly issues arise related to homework, irresponsibility, wasting time with friends, being disobedient and not showing good results in academics. More research findings support that parents have more complaints about preadolescents regarding their misconduct and not following family's explicit rules (Smetana, 2005).

Current study also explored the strategies good and problematic parents use in dealing with children's behavioral issues. Parents who face least level of problems in relationship with their children showed more constructive and supportive patterns of children's behavioral control. Explaining facts, goal setting, ignoring showing warmth and affection, persuasion, playing with them and moral education were most used strategies. On the other hand, problematic parents revealed more destructive strategies which they used to control their children's behavior. Then strategies include physical punishment, snubbing and annoying on top of the list. While other strategies include being coercive, fulfilling demands, humiliating and isolating. Although the sample was taken from normal population yet. If we compare both groups of parents, we come to conclusion that good parents have less severe negative child behavior outcomes while problematic parents have more disruptive child behavior outcomes. Multicultural research shows that supportive parents yield less child developmental and behavioral problems while problematic and less supportive parents yield more child developmental and behavioral issues (Leichtman, Wang, & Pillemer, 2003; Chen, Chen, T., & Zheng, 2012).

Suggestions and Implications

Present study aimed at exploring the causes and management strategies used by Pakistani parents having problems in relationship with their children and parents who have less or no problems with their children. Findings of the study will be very useful for researchers and counselors to develop counseling plans in order to guide them about positive parenting patterns which resultantly will bring a positive change at individual, family and societal level. Future can work with other factors and components of family and parental relationships. They can also develop and test therapeutic interventions for Pakistani and other Asian parents. Moreover, this research is based on qualitative design, future researches can use mixed methodology as well to bring about more objective results.

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