

Parent –Child Relationship, Parent-Child Attachment and Children’s Mental Health Among Adolescents in Secondary Schools

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Abstract: Every child goes through a period of adolescence before reaching adulthood. It is a complex and uncertain time that worries every parent who does not want the child to grow up outside the norms of society. This period of change is a time when a child can act independently in a positive or negative way. It is for this reason that this study was conducted to determine the contribution of parent-child relationships and parent-child bonding to the prediction of children's mental health. Parent-child relationships, child-child bonding, and child mental health measures were used to collect data for the study. Four hundred and forty-five (445) participants were recruited using a multilevel sampling method, where a correlation analysis was applied. Using multiple regression to analyze the data, the main results of the study showed that parent-child relationships and parent-child bonding were positively and significantly related to children's mental health ($f(2,442) = 13.3332$). This means that the two factors together accounted for about 13.2% of the variance. In terms of contribution, the parent-child relationship contributed significantly (β eta = .204 < .05) to the prediction, while the parent-child relationship also contributed significantly (β eta = .162; < .05) to the prediction. These findings indicate that the parent-child relationship and the parent-child relationship are important factors to consider when assessing the mental health of adolescents. It is especially recommended for parents to build a stable family that fosters a parent-child system to avoid provoking hostility between themselves and their children, thereby promoting good mental health.

Keywords: parent-child relationship, parent-child attachment, children's mental health, senior secondary school, students.

INTRODUCTION

The parent-child relationship is dealt with profoundly because it is the oldest and longest-lasting relationship that every individual might form in their life, and psychologically, educators feel that it is basic to deal with. The intimacy involved in parent-child relations makes it quite unlike any other form of relationship like family, friendship, which completely separates it from any other kind of relationship. As the child grows and interacts with the environment, this level of social and emotional stress escalates, while the mental and emotional stress increases as well, hence the significance of mental health attention. Identified as the first and closest relationship of children, depending upon the gestational age of the mother, parent-child relations appear in relationship forms as the parents' attitude toward children and the child's expectations of parents. Parent-child relationships can further be explained and categorized into four essential parenting styles such as (Tian, Beo, and Rid Lu 2013, Sexe and Mendaib, Takes, 2021): authoritative parents, authoritarian parents, permissive parents, and parent-resistant parents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parent-and-child relationships are a reflection of the diverse attitudes, feelings, and expectations held by each parent in relation to the adult child. This context covers all child development aspects. Parents are undeniably the prime caregivers to their children at almost any stage of growth and development. Child development theories accentuate the significance of this parent-child interaction in the child's psyche. Avoidant-attachment individuals altogether avoid becoming very intimate with others because of trust issues. In contrast, some adults with an anxious-attachment type will see others as unwelcome and will be very dependent of others (Safwa & Shari, 2022). According to her survey, Shaheen (2015) discovered negative correlations between negative upbringing strategies and aggression. She also found positive links between positive upbringing and aggression. If in a response to conflict resolution with their youngsters, the parents create even more chaos, the kids will only suffer from confusion. Meanwhile, parent-child relationships worsen into appropriately poor parenthood, ending in further negative detours and problems of violence and delinquency in adolescents (Kocak et al., 2017). In simple terms, attachment is defined as a "loving and enduring relationship between the caregiver and specific individual." Typically, the cutest of the infants will start to make attachments around first seven months of life. These kinds of relationships would be secure or insecure in infants. Therefore, the parent-child relationship, as the first social relationship into which children enter, afflicts many aspects of the child development, including personality, social understanding, and happiness. So far, the nature of the parent-child relationships falls into two categories of closeness and conflict intensifiers (Zhang et al., 2022).

The presence of social support can have less negative impacts on parent-child relationships by enhancing warmth and reducing enmity (Lippold, Glatz, Fosco, & Feinberg, 2018). And this is quite possible in two ways. One of them is that the support may contribute significantly to improve

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the quality of life for children within the family context (Feng, Zhon, Qin, Cai, Lin, Pang & Zhang, 2022; Balcells-Gine, Guadilla-Olmos, Summers & Mas, 2019). Because time invested in parenting creates better parent-child relationships, social support serves to diminish parental stress and parental mental health and to reinforce positive parenting behavior (Kang, Jeon, Kwon & Park, 2015).

Permanency of infant emotional attachment to child attachment of and importance to adolescents for academic motivation and behavior, and special for each individual(true). Therefore, in every positive sense, parents resonate with their children throughout the child-rearing process (Risi, Pickard, & Bird, 2021). Parents who have a strong level of trust in their children and maintain a good rapport with their peer groups are likely to end up involved in risk behaviors (Martinez-Escudero, Garcia, Alcaide Bochons, & Garcia, 2023). Yet, adolescents who get together with peers because of delinquency are likely to be reared in a laissez-faire manner at home (Villarejo, Garcia, Alcaide, Villarreal, and Garcia, 2023). As per above, it can be surmised that those adolescents who have bad-parent bonding are likely to socialize through their peer groups (Yildiz, 2016).

Well-being, a state of health, can be seen as a mechanism in the individual that is used to perform daily tasks with the least of perturbations, that is by making it more skillful in harmonizing relationships between others and also in optimizing sleep-rest when necessary (Jang, Jin & Yu, 2022). Health involves the whole being of a man, so health means physical, social, and mental well-being. The mental aspect of health is so poorly defined by any health practitioner or psychologist that it has assumed a relative nature. What seems like mental quirks to one person will be judged differently by another. Wealth takes its place among the attributes that can be considered in many ways and with lots of interpretations and standards that are tied to a time, a society, and a unique culture together with the interpretations therefrom. It is more a subject of description than being straightforwardly defined.

The wellness of an individual's emotions and their zeal to pursue projects reunites an individual with healthy association; thus, acting as the working base for a model Holy Grail for human society- and how well can they bounce back in kind to reversal and uncertainty in the face of day's upheavals (Lin & Huang, 2025). It stands to help them underlie emotional balance: personal immunity to such stresses as people come to experience every day but torture their bodies because of mental and/or physical stresses. Our mind has a mindset that stimulates action for the satisfaction and self-realization of people in oneness within their personality: clarity in one's awareness and self-understanding of oneself, one's motives and desires (Cheng, Han & Wang, 2023).

Good mental health serves as the bedrock of one's developmental process, reaching out to the human personality in entirety. The more electrified a society is with respect to the number of the inhabitants, the better mental health stands to its credit for progression. Nigerian teachers, especially those from the fields of psychology, are bemused by such pressing issues, that they cannot fathom but take the imperative kindness, given in the nature of good mental health for the

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students, as crucial for their responsibility. These professionals believe that academically poor students are simply suffering from a poor mental health state. Counselors and psychologists believe that personality disorders are indications of poor mental health. According to World Health Organisation (2022), mental health is not just the absence of disease, it is also the presence of positive attributes and traits such as life satisfaction, self-perception, emotional regulation, and functional social relationships. Mental Disorders among adolescents include depression, anxiety disorders and conduct disorders which is of course, still undiagnosed, therefore significantly under-reported because of the stigma attached to such disorders (Akpa, Odukoya & Ogunsola, 2019).

Nigeria is home to insufficient mental health professionals and inadequate infrastructure. With a population of over 200 million, this means just under 400 mental health specialists are serving the population, thereby increasing service delivery to these specialists. The rate of unemployment has worsened young Nigerians' poverty, therefore increasing manifestations of anxiety disorders, depression, and behavioral disorders. Experts have urged that community intervention and care services be encouraged to end this vicious cycle of poverty (Onyishi, Okongwu and Ugwu, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Several studies have consistently shown that the quality of attachment between parents and children plays a crucial role in adolescent development. Adolescents who experience warm, secure, and supportive relationships with their parents are more likely to enjoy strong parent-child bonds, while those exposed to poor-quality attachment often face greater emotional and behavioural challenges. Specifically, weak parent-child attachment has been linked to higher levels of internalising problems, such as anxiety and depression, as well as externalising behaviours, including aggression and rule-breaking (Yildiz, 2016; Chen et al., 2019; Laporta-Herrero et al., 2021).

Beyond the immediate parent-child relationship, parental security also shapes adolescents' broader social and emotional development. Research indicates that adolescents who feel secure with their parents tend to form healthier attachments with peers, show greater empathy, engage more readily in prosocial behaviours, and develop stronger self-esteem (Tan et al., 2023).

Adolescence is a particularly sensitive developmental stage, marked by rapid physical changes and heightened psychological and emotional demands. Despite these challenges, empirical studies focusing on parent-child relationships, bonding, and adolescent mental health remain relatively limited, especially those that directly examine how parent-child bonding influences adolescents' mental well-being. In response to this gap, the present study seeks to examine the influence of parent-child relationships and bonding on the mental health of adolescents, with the aim of contributing to a deeper understanding of factors that support healthy adolescent development.

Objectives of the Study

This study was conducted to:

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- i. investigate the combine contribution of parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment to the prediction of children's mental health.
- ii. find out the relative contribution of parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment to the prediction of children's mental health.

Hypotheses

In conducting the study, the following hypotheses were generated:

- 1. There is no combine contribution of parent – child relationship and parent – child attachment to the prediction of children's mental health.
- 2. There is no significant separate contribution of parent – child relationship and parent attachment to the prediction of children's mental health

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used an ex post-facto research design, in which multiple sets of questionnaires were used for data collection. The design was adopted because the variables to be investigated existed and no manipulation was required.

Population of the Study

The population of this study included all adolescents in public secondary schools aged 11-18 years in Oyo State. The selection of adolescents in secondary schools was to reduce the problems in reading and interpreting the questionnaire items.

Sample and Sampling Technique

In this study, a sample of 500 participants from ten (10) educational zones of the state was used. The ten (10) educational zones formed the basis for the selection of participants. From each zone, two (2) schools were selected through simple random sampling, with twenty-five (25) students from each school being selected through simple random sampling. This resulted in an initial sample of 500, out of which fifty-five (55) respondents were excluded because they did not complete the questionnaire correctly. Finally, 445 students were recruited, which is a response rate of 89%.

Instrumentation

Three standardized instruments were used to collect data for this study. These include the Child–Parent Relationship Scale, the Parent–Child Attachment Inventory, and the Children's Mental Health Scale. The questionnaire package was organised into four sections (A–D) to ensure clarity and ease of response.

Section A: Demographic Information

This section gathered background information about the participants. Items included gender, age, parents' marital status, and type of home environment. These variables were considered important for understanding the social context of the adolescents.

Section B: Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS)

The quality of the child-parent relationship was measured using the Child-Parent Relationship Scale originally developed by Pianta (1992) and later revised by Zhang (2015). The scale consists of 22 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all true*) to 5 (*Very true*). Higher scores indicate a stronger and more positive child-parent relationship. The scale has demonstrated good reliability, with a reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.805.

Section C: Parent-Child Attachment Scale (PCAS)

Parent-child attachment was assessed using the parental attachment subscale of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), developed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987). For this study, the 28-item parental attachment section was used. Respondents rated each item on a 5-point scale ranging from *almost never true* to *almost always true*. The scale measures three key dimensions of attachment: trust, communication, and alienation. Higher scores reflect stronger and healthier parent-child attachment. Reliability analysis has shown high internal consistency for the subscales, with Cronbach's alpha values reported as 0.90 for trust and 0.89 for communication and alienation. The overall test-retest reliability of the instrument has been reported as 0.93 (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

Section D: Children's Mental Health Scale (CMHS)

Children's mental health was measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) developed by Kou, Du, and Xia (2015). The scale consists of 25 items rated on a 3-point scale ranging from *does not fit* (1) to *fits perfectly* (3). The questionnaire assesses five dimensions of mental health: emotional symptoms, behavioural problems, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, peer relationship problems, and antisocial behaviour. One of the items specifically assesses consideration for other people's feelings. Higher scores indicate better mental health status. The SDQ is designed for use by parents, teachers, and adolescents aged 11 years and above; the youth self-report version was adopted for this study. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92.

Data Collection

The instruments were distributed to students in the selected high schools after obtaining permission from principals and teachers to access the study participants. The services of three research assistants were requested to assist in the administration of the three scales. They were informed about the purpose of the study and the nature of the instrument, while participants were assured of the voluntary and confidential nature of the research.

Data Analysis

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the complementary contributions of the independent variables to the prediction of adolescents' mental health.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS**Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis 1: There is no combine contribution of parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment to the prediction of children's mental health.

Table 1: Model summary of the multiple Regression Analysis for the combined contributions of parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment to the prediction of children's mental health.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate
.364	.132	.124	5.762

Model	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	S
Regression	1132.216	2	561.108	13.332	
Residual	18602.423	442	42.087		
Total	19734.639	444			

Concerning the two variables, the "model that included "SEM with "parent-child relationship and parent-child bonding titles" were both statistically significant predictors of the child's mental health parameters ($R = .364$; $R^2 = .132$; $F(2, 442) = 13.332$ $p < .05$). This leads to a preliminary analysis that the two independent predictors accounted for 13.2% of the variance in the child's mental health. In other words, the influence of the parent-child relationship quality and bonding together makes a significant difference in predicting the variation in a child's mental health. The overall model falls under statistical significance, thereby partially predicting variation in mental health outcomes.

Clearly, they are representative of the role that bonding or parent-child relationship would play in the mental well-being of a child. Still, the inclusion of items in this study model accounted for only 13.2%, leaving 86.8% unexplained variation. Another talking point is that this apparent gap illustrates the requirement for further psychological, social and environmental investigation about alternative factors that may influence mental well-being in children.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant separate contribution of parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment to the prediction of children's mental health

Table 2: Separate contributions of parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment to the prediction of children's mental health

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sign
	B	Std Error	Beta	
Constant	3.095	1.546		2.092
Parent-child relationship	.157	.038	.162	4.134
Parent-child attachment	.352	.066	.204	5.308

The findings as presented in Table 1 tell that when parent-child relationship and parent-child bonding were accounted in the regression model jointly, they significantly predicted personal or emotional problems in children ($R = .364$; $R^2 = .132$; $F(2, 442) = 13.332$; $p < .05$), hence showing that the predictor variables together accounted for 13.2% of variance in mental health of children. This means that the combined influence of quality of parent-child relationship and bonding is relevant in the explanation of the varied mental well-being of children. The overall regression model was significant and ultimately supports the idea that they can explain parts of the variance in mental health outcomes.

The intervening role of parent-child relationships and bonding in determining a child's mental health becomes evident. However, the large proportion of unexplained variance (86.8%) heightens interest in other factors outside those considered in this model, which impact children's mental health significantly. Thus, other research should probe into possible psychological, social, and environmental factors for maintaining children's mental well-being.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to identify parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment as possible predictors for children's mental health. The research found that they both made good positive contributions to mental health among children. Both findings were found significant in causing children's mental health when analyzed together, with the former keeping a significant positive relationship with children's mental health ($F(2, 442) = 13.332$; $R = .364$; $R^2 = .132$; Adjusted $R^2 = .124$; $p < .05$). Together, 12.4% of the variance was accounted for in the children's mental health. It suggests an important but on the lighter side influence of these variables.

These findings resonate with past findings in relation to parent-child relationship and attachments and children's mental health (Balcells-Balcells et al., 2019 identified; Onyishi, Okongwu, & Ugwu, 2021; Safwa & Shari, 2022; thus, Seror, 2022; Fu, 2023, the box with 10bps; Yan, Yu, & Lin, 2023; also). Prior studies confirm weakening or conflictual parent-child relationships that tend to have extreme impacts on adolescents' psychological development and emotional care (Dam, Do,

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& Vu, 2023). Lin and Yi [2019] reported very much the same that adolescents maintaining close, supportive links with parents experience much higher levels of life satisfaction and mental health. The analysis provided in Table 2 attempted to distinguish between the contributions of independent variables. As shown, the summary of the results reveals that both earning good parent-child relationship ($\beta = .162$; $p < .05$) and parent-child bonding ($\beta = .204$; $p < .05$) significantly contribute to children's mental health. Meaning that both paths are having considerable independent influences on adolescent mental health, with the parent-child bond suggesting a higher to numerous times greater contribution over the other factor. A richer picture paints the background as indicating that parent-child relationship and attachment are significant determinants of adolescents' mental health.

Confirming the findings of previous studies that discovered parent-child relations and attachment as potent moderating factors of the child's mental health (Risi, Pickford & Bird, 2011; Safwa & Shari, 2012; Feng et al. 2012; Seror, 2014; Fu, 2015; Yan, Yu, & Lin, 2016), the present study adds that parent-child relationship is of utmost significance in the mental health of adolescents, lending support to previous studies that showed the direct effect of parent-child connections on personality development and emotional equilibrium (Belsky & Jaffree, 2015; Li et al., 2020; Solanki & Jyotsana, 2024).

The analysis, also showed that parent-child attachment significantly and positively moderated adolescent's mental health. Findings herein corroborate with previously established research revealing that robust parent-child attachment is closely associated with emotional and psychological well-being of adolescents (Yildiz, 2015; Chen, et al., 2019; Laporta-Herrero et al., 2021). It is also critical to note that the parent-adolescent relationship does not abruptly end with adolescence; rather, it goes through a process of transformation that is characterised by the roles and expectations that are changing. During adolescence, attachment bonds are reshaped instead of broken, as they continue to count on their particular parents for sources of support and viewing them as central figures in their lives.

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Therefore, of critical importance is the conceptual and practice-related implications highlighted aforementioned that could illuminate further the mediating effect of parent-child relationships and parent-child attachment on the mental health of children. Parents who have a stable marriage, have more tendencies to exhibit the kinds of accepting behavior, attitude, and emotional aspects to children that culminate in secure attachment and strong bonding between parents and children. Conversely, it is observed that parents indulging in constant conflict and disputes are more of the kinds that are unable to provide stability to their children. In their attempt to shield against the constant bickering among their parents, the children might develop an inability to place trust in their parents.

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Strong and significant positive correlation were found between parent-child attachment and mental health of children. It is suggested that parents endear their children to them with close, warm, and positive regard in order that children can have better mental health. Some adolescents feel talking to their parents makes them vulnerable and miserable and think parents will give them a cold shoulder. It shall disturb their relation to a large extent and will lead to extremely low attachment. The findings may just be an eye-opener for the parents to see how time is running out for open communication with their partners, especially when they are in this exploration. By making parents begin to have fun together with their child, they get satisfaction and each one feels closer in relationship than before. This will help to avoid the booby traps in the family structure.

The social settings have influence on the motivation, performance, and well-being of their youths who operate within them. When children feel their lives are meaningless and the whole world conspires against them, motivation decreases, which in turn might have a negative impact on optimal functioning and mental health. Such depression merges with stress, irregular mood swings from mania to despair, further developing a myriad of disorders. Understanding the positive and significant relationships that correlate among study variables will enhance the relationship between parents and children to work together in promoting the mental health of the child. The main thing is for parents to establish an emotional bond between them and their children. They should provide an environment friendly towards discussing any issue their teenager may have restricting what may affect his or her mental health.

CONCLUSION

Mental health problems are issues that cause worry to individuals and as such inhibit individuals emotional wellbeing. From what has been discussed so far, it is evident that adolescents need parental warmth and care when they were under the full control of their parents for good mental development and wellbeing. The main findings of this study showed that parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment were positively correlated with mental health of adolescents when combined. Parent-child relationship strongly moderated adolescents' mental health. Furthermore, it was found that parent-child attachment made the more significant impact to the prediction of children's mental health. Therefore, parents should strive to keep strong relationship with their adolescents so as not tolerate a dangerous gap which could be exploited by other forces such as the peer group whose result may not be palatable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted in south western part of Nigeria. Future research should be conducted in other parts of the country to cover how parent-child relationship and parent-child attachment influence adolescents mental health.

Future research should took into adding more variables which may affect the independent variables. There is need for educators to leverage these outcomes to support the mental health of adolescents. Parents should endeavor to develop positive parent-child relationships that will endanger trust and effective communication.

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Mental health education should be integrated into school curriculum to serve as a long term solution through the provision of knowledge, skills and support structures which will empower them to enhance and maintain their mental well-being.

Children should be availed with timely access to mental health support which is important because enhanced long term outcome are related to early intervention.

Parents are encouraged to build stable homes because family starts from building a stable family which nurtures the parent-child system. On the other hand tension in the family can trigger hostility between parents and their children. This may eventually lead to problem for children thereby affecting their mental health.

Efforts should be intensified in the training and preparation of people to cater for the mental health of individuals. A psychological healthy person tends to have fewer physical illness and complaints than someone with psychological problems.

Good mental health to a large extent contributes to the personality level of personality development of individuals. Psychologists should therefore to pay attention to issues of human mental health status and its implications to human welfare.

Unstable economic growth and insecurity in the country contribute to anxiety and tension felt by many persons. By implication, anxiety and insecurity threatens happiness and excitement which creates emotional imbalance. Psychologists should therefore enhance the understanding of people on how to overcome anxiety as well as adjustment processes that are required to live an anxiety free life thereby enhancing good mental health.

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