

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AS DETERMINANT OF ADOLESCENTS' MENTAL HEALTH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated the parent-child-relationship as determinant of adolescents' mental health in secondary school in Enugu State. Three purposes, three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted correlation research design. The study adopted correlation research design with population which comprised 10245 (4105 males and 6140 females) adolescents in SSII in secondary schools in Enugu State. The sample for the study consisted of 300 SSII adolescents which were drawn from public schools in Enugu State. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw 5 schools from each education zone, giving a total of 15 schools. Specifically, 20 adolescents were simple randomly drawn from each 29 schools amounting to 300 adolescents in 15 schools. Two instruments titled Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRQ) and Mental Health Inventory (MHQ) were used for data collection. The PCRQ and MHI has 15 items each. The instruments were validated by three experts, one from Measurement and Evaluation and the other two from Educational Psychology, all from Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Internal reliability coefficients of 0.81 and 0.75 were established for PCRQ and MHI through Crombach alpha respectively. Simple regression was used to answer the research questions while t-test associated with simple regression was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that there is a significant low positive relationship between parent-child attachment anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State. It was found that there is a significant very low positive relationship between parent-child involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State. It was found that there is a very high positive relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State. It was recommended that parents should be involved in their children's academic activities in order to reduce their school anxiety. The parents should constantly provide emotional supportive to their children in order to reduce their level of depression. The parents and their children should establish a functional interactive approach that can build students' self-esteem.

Keywords: Parent-child relationship, adolescents and mental health.

Introduction

Adolescence is that pivotal phase where kids transition into adulthood. It kicks off with puberty, which typically starts around ages 12 to 13 for girls and about 14 for boys, lasting until roughly 19 years old (Martin, 2010). During this time, teens face a whirlwind of experiences and feelings of uncertainty, all while discovering new skills and competencies that shape their lives (Maglica, Ercegovic & Ljubetic, 2021). Neurological research highlights how crucial this stage is, as it can significantly influence their future paths. It's a time filled with self-discovery and identity formation, marked by conflict, confusion, adventure, friendships, exploration, and the impact of mass media.

Unfortunately, the attention that parents and caregivers give to adolescents during this critical period has often been overlooked. The relationship between parents and their teens plays a vital role in mental health, a topic that has garnered significant interest from global organizations like the WHO, and it's something that needs to be addressed. Parents truly have a key role in their children's overall development.

The parent-child relationship is a crucial part of human development, significantly impacting various aspects of a child's life within society. Like any relationship, nurturing a strong and positive bond between parent and child takes effort and dedication (Nirgamma, 2023). Parenting and fostering a close relationship can be quite challenging. Kolyukh and Oragwuncha (2024) describe the parent-child relationship as unique, setting it apart from other relationships like those with partners, family, or friends due to its level of intimacy. This suggests that it's a profound and enduring connection shaped by culture, family practices, and children's behavior. Bornstein (2023) notes that the parent-child relationship plays a vital role in how adolescents engage socially and behave in various settings. This relationship encompasses both emotional and behavioral ties between parents and their children. Researchers exploring the parent-child dynamic have examined various facets, often focusing on how this relationship affects children's decision-making and communication, as well as its impact on emotional development and regulation (Silvia, 2022), attachment, parental involvement, and autonomy, among other areas. In this study, the researcher is particularly interested in parent-child attachment, parental involvement, and communication. Here, the parent-child relationship is defined as the strong connections parents share with their children, which thrive when both parties maintain a close bond.

Parent-child attachment is very vital in every growing child. Parent-child attachment has to do with emotional bond that parents develop with their children during the process of raising them (Bailey, & Clark, 2024). This bond profoundly influences the individual's physical and mental well-being and its impact remains pivotal during adolescence, despite the increasing diversification of attachment form including the growing importance of peer influence (Gorrese & Ruggieri, 2012). However, it appears that attachment to peers tends to be based on family experiences. Research has it that adolescents with low-quality parent-child attachment are more likely to seek attachment to their peers. However, it has been observed that high-quality peer attachment does not compensate for lack mental health benefit for those with low-quality parent-child attachment (Zhang & Deng, 2022; Chen et al, 2023). This implies that parent-child attachment may not be the exclusive form of attachment for adolescents, it continues to be a critical factor in their mental well-being. There are types of attachment especially in adolescents. Parent-child attachment in adolescent arose from childhood, generally are secure attachment or insecure, anxious-preoccupied attachment, dismissive-avoidant attachment. Secure attachment is noted by trust, emotional openness and effective communication. The adolescents feel comfortable with autonomy, using parents as a safe base. Under this anxious-preoccupied attachment adolescents often exhibit high distress, clinginess, and insecurity. They may demand attention and validation due to inconsistent parenting. In dismissive-avoidant attachment adolescents tend to downplay the importance of relationships, emotionally distancing themselves from parents (Ylo, 2022). Parent-child attachment in the context of this study is the strong bond or interaction between parent and child that hold them together. This bond may be stronger if the parent is deeply involved in all ramification.

Parental involvement plays a significant role in shaping mental health of adolescents. Petersen-Brown, Kinsey Hawley, Fischer, and Schneider (2024) see parental involvement as the participation of parents or other significant caregivers in education-related activities meant to promote the academic and social/emotional well-being of children especially adolescents. Parental participation is significantly associated with higher grades (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). This implies that parental involvement encourages the adolescents to score high mark in school activities. There are different types of parental involvement: Parental expectation/aspirations, school-based involvement which has to do with attending events in school, communication- discussing school, giving advice, homework assistance (Ylo, 2022) and many others. In the context if this study, parental involvement is seen as the overall

engagement of parents in their children's activities in life. It is observed that proper involvement by parent may not effectively be achieved without effective communication.

Parent-child communication is very crucial for adolescents' mental health. Parent-child communication refers to the interactive exchange between parents and children through the children acquire language and are socialized into their community and culture (Marlette, Prevoo & Tamis-LeMonda, 2017). Cultural differences in parent-child communication can be seen in the degree of communicative accommodation – extent to which the communication is child focused or situation-focused. Parent in different cultural communities vary how much they use language to impart knowledge to children. Effective parent-child communication may help in reducing depression, anxiety and behavioural issues among adolescents (Ying, Liu, Shi, Shi, & Wu, 2025). The communication may be characterized by different levels of warmth and control. Effective communication makes for active listening, validation and open-ended questions, whereas other patterns include pluralistic, protective or passive which helps define rules and feeling. Weger et al (2014) stress that communication is very important when it involve adolescents. In the context of this study, parent-child communication is the means of transmitting message to one another. Moreover, if the above variables are properly addressed, mental health of adolescents would be influence.

Mental health is an integral and important component of the entire human health. This is understood as a wholeness of physical, mental, social well-being and not merely as the absence of disease or weakness (Maglica, Ercegovic, & Ljubetic, (2021)). It helps an individual to understand their potential, productivity, possible contribution he/she can make to the society they live in and adequately cope with the challenging world (WHO, 2014). The mental health of adolescent is of great interest to many practitioners because the period of adolescence has to do with strong and growing changes and stage learning experiences that occur during this transition from childhood to adulthood. Mental health has to do with a state of internal and external equilibrium and harmonization, enabling individuals to effectively manage positive or negative emotions and adapt to the society (Tu, 2022). It implies that a significant percentage of adolescents that exist who manifest mental problems should be handled carefully to enable them manage the situation. Despite all that has been said above, Ordonez and Collins (2015) opined that adolescents' mental health is not taken serious in the context of mental health society, that additional research should be conducted. Coming to adolescents' mental problems, Erskine et al, (2017) has it that global prevalence data is still scare. World Health Organization data indicates that adolescents aged 13-18years manifest anxiety problems (more than 20%), depression (10-15%), suicide which is second cause of death in individual is about (15-19) years (WHO, 2014). According to Rose, Lambert, Liu, Raghunathan, Musci, Sullivan, & Hooper, (2025), environment and interaction, risk and protective factors. These could affect adolescents' mental health.

It is disheartening to note that parent-child relationship seemed to be low in our society today. However, considering the different types of relationship, the extent to which parent-child relationship would influence adolescents' mental health in secondary schools in Enugu state, Nigeria, is yet not clearly known. There is no empirical evidence on the parent-child relationship as determinant of adolescents' mental health in secondary schools in Enugu state, Nigeria. It is based on this backdrop that the researcher investigates parent-child relationship as determinant of adolescents' mental health in secondary schools in Enugu state, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate parent-child relationship as determinant of adolescents' mental health in secondary schools in Enugu State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. examine the relationship between parent-child attachment and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary school in Enugu state.
2. investigate the relationship between parental involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary school in Enugu state.
3. Find out the relationship parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the relationship between parent-child attachment and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State?
2. what is the relationship between parental involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state?
3. What is the relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state?

Hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between parent-child attachment and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.
2. There is a significant relationship between parental involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.
3. There is a significant relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.

Methods

The study adopted correlation research design with population which comprised 10245 (4105 males and 6140 females) adolescents in SSII in secondary schools in Enugu State. The sample for the study consisted of 300 SSII adolescents which were drawn from public schools in Enugu State. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw 5 schools from each education zone, giving a total of 15 schools. Specifically, 20 adolescents were simple randomly drawn from each 29 schools amounting to 300 adolescents in 15 schools. Two instruments titled Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) and Mental Health Inventory (MHI) developed by the researcher from the literature were used for data collection. The PCRI and MHI has 15 items each. The instruments were validated by three experts, one from Measurement and Evaluation and the other two from Educational Psychology, all from Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Internal reliability coefficients of 0.81 and 0.75 were established for PCRI and MHI through Crombach alpha respectively. Simple regression was used to answer the research questions while t-test associated with simple regression was used to test the hypotheses at 0,05 level of significance.

Results

Research question 1: What is the relationship between parent-child attachment and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Table 1: simple regression of the relationship between parent-child attachment and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.023 ^a	.001	-.003	6.69346

Data on table 1 shows that the regression and regression square coefficients are .023 and .001 respectively. The finding shows that there is a low positive relationship between parent-child attachment anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State.

H₀₁: There is a significant relationship between parent-child attachment and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.

Table 2: ANOVA associated with regression of the relationship between parent-child attachment and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.117	1	7.117	.159	.691 ^b
	Residual	13351.133	298	44.802		
	Total	13358.250	299			

Data on table 2 shows that the ANOVA value of $F(1, 298) = .159$, $\text{Sig.} = .691 > P = .05$. The hypothesis is not significant because the significant value of .691 is greater than the alpha value of .05. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between parent-child attachment and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.

Research question 2: what is the relationship between parental involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state?

Table 3: simple regression of the relationship between parental involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.068 ^a	.005	.001	6.67993

Data on table 3 shows that the regression and regression square coefficients are .068 and .005 respectively. The finding shows that there is a very low positive relationship between parent-child involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State.

H₀₂: there is no significant relationship between parental involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.

Table 4: t-test associated with regression of the relationship between parental involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	61.051	1	61.051	1.368	.243 ^b
	Residual	13297.199	298	44.621		
	Total	13358.250	299			

Data on table 4 shows that the ANOVA value of $F(1, 298) = 1.368$, $\text{Sig.} = .243 > P = .05$. The hypothesis is not significant because the significant value of .243 is greater than the alpha value of .05. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between parental involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.

Research question 3: What is the relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state?

Table 5: simple regression of the relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.740 ^a	.548	.502	6.68980

Data on table 5 shows that the regression and regression square coefficients are .740 and .502 respectively. The finding shows that there is a very high positive relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State.

H₀₃: there is no significant relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.

Table 6: t-test associated with regression of the relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.717	1	21.717	2.770	.033
	Residual	2336.533	298	7.840		
	Total	13358.250	299			

Data on table 6 shows that the ANOVA value of $F(1, 298) = 2.770$, $\text{Sig.} = .033 < P = .05$. The hypothesis is significant because the significant value of .033 is less than the alpha value of .05. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu state.

Summary of Findings

The findings showed that:

1. there is a significant low positive relationship between parent-child attachment anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State.
2. there is a significant very low positive relationship between parent-child involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State.
3. there is a very high positive relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Conclusion

Based on the finding of this study it was concluded that parent-child relationship are strong determinant of adolescents' mental health in secondary schools in Enugu State. Specifically, it concluded that parent-child attachment is very minute in their relationship with anxiety symptoms among adolescents. The study also concluded that parent-child involvement can bring about very little depressive symptoms among adolescents. The study finally concluded that parent-child communication is very much associated to self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Discussion

Parent-Child Attachment and Anxiety Symptoms

The finding of this study showed that there is a significant low positive relationship between parent-child attachment anxiety symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State. It is a bit surprising, but the positive direction here doesn't quite fit the usual pattern, since secure attachment usually helps reduce anxiety. In this case, though, it might point to an anxious-ambivalent attachment style, where a strong emotional bond comes with a fear of being rejected or abandoned. This can lead to behaviors like clinginess, overdependence, and constant worry about whether parents are available, which can ramp up anxiety symptoms. It's also worth noting that the relationship's low magnitude is significant. It suggests that anxiety in these teens is influenced by multiple factors. Things like academic stress, friendships, social media habits, or even genetic traits probably play just as big a role, if not more. Plus, as teens start to gain more independence, the impact of their parents lessens, meaning attachment is just one piece of a much larger puzzle. The finding of this study buttressed that of Bornstein (2023), which showed that parent-child relationship influences how adolescents interact socially and behave in any environment they find themselves.

Parent-Child Involvement and Depressive Symptoms

The finding of this study showed that there is a significant very low positive relationship between parent-child involvement and depressive symptoms among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State. The research revealed a notable, albeit very weak,

positive correlation between how involved parents are with their children and the levels of depressive symptoms in secondary school students in Enugu State. In simpler terms, it suggests that as parent-child involvement goes up, there's a slight increase in depressive symptoms, but the connection is so weak that it probably doesn't have much real-world significance. The finding of this study is in tandem with that of Bornstein (2023) which showed that parent-child relationship influences how adolescents interact socially and behave in any environment they find themselves.

Parent-Child Communication and Self-Esteem

The finding of this study showed that there is a very high positive relationship between parent-child communication and self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools in Enugu State. This study highlights a strong positive connection between how parents communicate with their children and the self-esteem of adolescents in Enugu State. It confirms that having open, supportive, and regular conversations is essential for the psychological well-being of secondary school students. This finding is especially important because it shows that authoritative communication where warmth meets structure has a greater impact than simply being authoritarian and silent. When adolescents feel that their voices are heard within the family, they are more likely to build resilience against the pressures of school and peers. The finding of this study implied that parent-child communication is very crucial for adolescents' mental health. Parent-child communication refers to the interactive exchange between parents and children through the children acquire language and are socialized into their community and culture (Marlelle, Prevoo & Tamis-Lemonda, 2017). Effective parent-child communication may help in reducing depression, anxiety and behavioural issues among adolescents (Ying, Liu, Shi, Shi, & Wu, 2025)

Recommendations

It was recommended that:

1. the parents should be involved in their children's academic activities in order to reduce their school anxiety.
2. The parents should constantly provide emotional supportive to their children in order to reduce their level of depression.
3. The parents and their children should establish a functional interactive approaches that can build students' self-esteem.

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