

## **PARENTAL WARMTH, AFFECTION AND BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

There can scarcely be any doubt that today; students are pressurized on three fronts: school, parents, and society. This could lead to poor psychological well-being among them, as is evident from the ever-increasing spate of suicides occurring among India's youth. In order to meet these challenges, parents need to act as a source of unfailing support and encouragement for school-going students. Hence, the present study intends to identify the relationship of parental warmth and affection with behaviour problems of school students. It also aims to identify the influence of gender, grade and mothers' occupational status on behaviour problems among school students. An ex post facto research design was used for the study, and a convenience sampling procedure to collect data. The total sample comprises 99 students studying in Standards (Stds) 8, 9, 10 and 11. Of the total number of students, 53 were boys and 46 girls. The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire was used to assess parental warmth and affection. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was used to assess behaviour problems. Pearson's Correlation was used to test the relationship in question, and a t-test was used to ascertain the difference in behaviour problems based on gender, grade and mothers' occupational status. The findings revealed that parental warmth and affection as negatively related to behaviour problems among school students. It was also found that there were no differences in behaviour problems based on gender and mothers' occupational status. However, students from Standards 8 and 9 were found to have relatively more behaviour problems than those in Standards 10 and 11. The findings were discussed, based on the importance of parenting during adolescence.

**Keywords:** Parental Warmth and affection, Behaviour Problems, Emotional Problems, Adolescents,

## **Introduction**

Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and mental human development, generally occurring between puberty and legal adulthood, but largely characterized as beginning and ending with the teen years. The end of adolescence and beginning of adulthood varies from country to country and by function and, furthermore, within even a single nation-state or culture there can be different ages at which an individual is considered to be (both chronologically and legally) mature enough to be entrusted by society with certain tasks. Adolescence is usually characterized by increased independence, permitted by parents or legal guardians, as well as decreased supervision on the part of said parents or legal guardians, quite contrary to the pre-adolescence stage. It is characterized by a number of cognitive, emotional, physical and attitudinal changes, which can be both a cause of conflict on one hand and positive personality development on the other. The environment obtaining at home and the relationship shared with parents are crucial factors that determine the behaviour of, and choices made by, adolescents. Adolescents who enjoy a good relationship with their parents are less likely to engage in various forms of risky behaviour such as smoking, drinking and fighting. Adolescents, who are more flexible than younger children, yet appear to be more hostile and rigid when compared to adults.

Emotional problems, also dominant during this period, include overeating, excessive drowsiness, a persistent obsession with appearance, and signs of emotional distress. Emotional problems often tend to affect school work. Worry about oneself one's family circumstances, and so on, makes it difficult to concentrate. Pressure to do well and pass exams may stem from parents or teachers, but adolescents usually want to do well and will push themselves to do so. Excessive nagging can be counter-productive. Exams are an important factor - however, if they are the sole driving force in a student's life, general unhappiness may result. Further, parents often feel they have lost control of or fail to wield any influence over their child. Adolescents want their parents to be clear and consistent with regard to

rules and boundaries yet, at the same time, may resent restrictions on their growing freedom and ability to decide for themselves. Emotional problems eventually result in behavioural problems, psychological distress, poor psychological well being, etc.

A majority of people manifest some degree of behavioural problems throughout their lives. Fortunately, not all people suffer from severe behavioural problems. Some people suffer from severe, sometimes even innate, behavioural problems; others show problems that are more or less related to the environment or to key life events. Sometimes children display a wide range of behaviour which creates problems for parents, family and society. Behaviour problems include anxiety, depression/withdrawal, somatic complaints, attention problems, social problems, thought problems, rule-breaking behaviour and aggressive behaviour (Achenbach, 1991), but Goodman (1999) has classified behavior problems into emotional symptoms, problems with conduct, hyperactivity/ inattention and peer problems. These problems are chiefly caused by a failure to adjust to the external environment, as well as the presence of internal conflicts (Dutta, 1985). A behaviour problem can be defined as an abnormality - of emotion, behaviour or relationship - that is sufficiently severe and persistent enough to handicap the child in his/her social or personal functioning, or to cause acute distress to the child, his/ her parents or to the community at large (Dutta, 1985). Mohanraj (2006) reported 24% to be the prevalence rate of depression among adolescents in Chennai, India. It is important to apprehend that all children go through periods of behavioural and emotional disturbances in the process of growth and development. Dhoundiyal and Venkatesh (2009) reported problems with personal conduct as the primary problem among children, followed by problems in peer relations, prosocial behavior and emotional symptoms.

These behavioural problems are caused by multiple factors; no single event can be attributed as a cause for this condition. The causes for behavioural problems in children could be any of the following: negative parental attitudes, an inadequacy in the environment at home in the family, the influence of social relationships, the influence of mass media, the influence of social change, the presence of mental or

physical illness, or being differently abled. One important causal factor of behavioural problems includes parental warmth and affection or a lack thereof. Just as the family influences the child, the broader culture prevailing influences the parents too (Crystal, Chen & Foligni, 1994). Parental attitudes and behaviour are guided and prescribed by socialization goals appropriate to their culture (Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000). Socialization goals vary across cultures, according to the specific qualities and outcomes in children that are valued and emphasized. These socialization values affect parenting practices, and these practices may, in turn, lead to certain types of problems being suppressed or promoted. Based on ecological factors, for example, researchers have predicted that the Chinese emphasis on social order and harmony in interpersonal relationships would facilitate the development of psychological problems related to over-controlled behaviour, specifically, of depressed moods, anxiety, and somatization (Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000).

Parental warmth and pressure may play causal roles in the development of anxiety and depression in adolescents. It is possible that the causal process may work in both of those directions and, over time, a circular process may develop in which parental behaviour affects adolescent well-being *and, consequently*, adolescent functioning affects parenting. It is apparent that parental warmth, affection, and positive involvement have been positively associated with healthy emotional, social, and behavioural adjustments in their children. Ecological theory uses a person-process-context model that suggests that individuals are influenced at multiple levels: the level of their own individual characteristics, the family level, and the cultural level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Family characteristics such as conflict and a lack of cohesiveness have been shown to be associated with depression and anxiety in children. Parent-child interaction constitutes an important context that may elicit and sustain a child's social and behavioural problems (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1997; Chen, Rubin, Li & Shek, 1996).

Kazarian, Moghnie and Martin (2010) reported parental warmth scores as positively related to subjective happiness ratings, and parental overall rejection (and specific rejection) scores as negatively related to the same. Eiden, Colder, Edwards and Leonard (2009)

stated that low maternal warmth/sensitivity directed towards children aged two years was reported as predictive of lower child self-regulation in children aged three. Kim (2008) reported that a low degree of perceived maternal and paternal warmth was positively related to adolescents' overall poor psychological adjustment, and almost all of its associated attributes. Suchman, Decoste and Luthar (2007) supported the theoretical stance that parental limit-setting and autonomy support, as well as nurturance and involvement, are important factors, respectively, in children's behavioural and psychological adjustment. These findings emphasize the importance of parenting influences on the extent of behavioural problems in children.

Behavioural problems are among the most common issues that parents have with children. Parents need to understand the reason for their children's behavioural problems so as to be able to effectively help and support them in alleviating such problems. Parental warmth and affection play a key role in helping attenuate behavioural problems in adolescents. Therefore, this study aims to explicate parental warmth and affection as the sole explanatory factor responsible for behavioural problems in adolescent students, since human behaviour cannot merely be explained away by simply resorting to easy platitudes. However, this study attempts to add to the existing body of literature that deals with the influence of parental warmth and affection on behavioural problems in school students.

### **Objectives**

1. To observe the relationship between parental warmth and affection, and the behavioural problems of school students,
2. To identify gender differences in behavioural problems, parental warmth and affection of school students, and
3. To detect the influence of gender and mothers' occupations on the behavioural problems of school students

### **Hypotheses**

1. Parental warmth and affection would be significantly negatively related to the behavioural problems of school students..
2. Boys and girls would not differ significantly in behavioural problems.

3. Boys and girls would not show significant differences in their perception of parental warmth and affection.
4. Grade would not significantly influence the behaviour problems of school students.
5. Mothers' occupations would not significantly influence behavioural problems of school students.

### **Method of Investigation**

#### **Description of the sample**

An ex post facto research design was used in this study, and a convenience sampling procedure used to collect data. The sample comprised 99 school-going students. The sample chosen for the study was from Stds 8, 9, 10 & 11 of matriculation schools in the city of Chennai. The schools and the sample chosen were based on convenience. The selected schools were co- educational institutions from which 53 boys and 46 girls were chosen. The mean age of the sample was 14.3 years.

#### **Tools used**

1. Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Rohner, 1984): Parental warmth and affection were measured using the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Rohner, 1984). The PARQ is a self-reporting questionnaire that asks children to reflect on the way their parents treat them, assessing their parents' behaviour in terms of four subscales: (a) perceived warmth and affection, (b) perceived hostility and aggression, (c) perceived indifference and neglect, (d) perceived undifferentiated rejection. Among these four dimensions, only the perceived warmth and affection dimension is used in this study.
2. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1999): The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) developed by Goodman (1999) is used to assess the behaviour problems and prosocial behaviour of an individual. Goodman had, in his study, produced adequate evidence for the concurrent and predictive validity of the SDQ. The SDQ has three forms: the self-report form, which is filled in by the adolescent, and two other forms

(filled in by either a parent or teacher). The present study uses only the self-report form. The dimensions of the tool are; emotional symptoms, problems with conduct, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and prosocial behavior. Among these five dimensions, the first four assess those difficulties which are specifically named as behavior problems. Since the objective of the current study was to identify the influence of the independent variable on behavior problems, only the first four dimensions were used.

### **Administration Procedure**

Prior permission was obtained, from Principals of several schools in the city of Chennai. Both questionnaires were then distributed to students chosen for the study, after a rapport had been established and the purpose of the study communicated to them. Precise instructions were given to the respondents who were asked not to skip a single item. They were also assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Every respondent was personally provided with questionnaires, which were collected when completed.

### **Statistical Analysis Used**

The statistical methods used for the study were Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Independent Sample t-test. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to establish the relationship between parental warmth and affection and behavioural problems. An independent sample t-test was used to determine the influence of gender, grade and mothers' occupations on behavioural problems among school students.

### **Results and discussion**

**Table No.1 : Relationship between parental warmth and affection and behavioural problems of school students**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>r</b>
Parental warmth and affection	99	63.72	7.32	-.237 *
Behavioural problems	99	18.60	5.01	

\*Significant at 0.05 level

Table 1 indicates that the r value is -.237, which is significant at .05 level. This shows that there was an inverse relationship between

parental warmth and affection and behaviour problems. Therefore, it can be inferred that individuals who have experienced better parental warmth and affection tend to have fewer behaviour problems. Hence the hypothesis which stated that parental warmth and affection would be significantly negatively related to behavioural problems of school students is accepted.

**Table No.2 : Gender differences in behaviour problems of school students**

Variables	Gender	n	Mean	S.D	t
Behavioural problems	Boys	53	18.69	4.58	238 NS
	Girls	46	18.48	5.50	

NS Not Significant

Table 2 indicates that t value is .238, which is not significant at any level. It shows that there was no difference, between boys and girls, in the behavioural problems faced. It reveals that both genders have similar levels of behavioural problems. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that boys and girls would not significantly differ in behavioural problems is accepted.

**Table No.3 : Gender differences in parental warmth and affection of school students**

Variables	Gender	n	Mean	S.D	t
Parental warmth and affection	Boys	53	62.17	7.64	2.30*
	Girls	46	65.5	6.57	

\*Significant at .05 level

Table 3 indicates t value is 2.30, which is significant at .05 level. It shows that gender differences do exist in the degree of parental warmth and affection. It reveals that boys and girls differ in their perceptions of parental warmth and affection. Thus, it can be inferred from the mean value that girls perceived they received more parental warmth and affection than did boys. Hence, the null hypothesis which stated that boys and girls would not significantly differ in their perceptions of parental warmth and affection is rejected and an alternative hypothesis accepted.



**Table No.4 : Grade differences in behavioural problems of school students**

Variables	Grade	n	Mean	S.D	t
Behavioural problems	8 & 9	56	19.48	4.38	2.04*
	10 & 11	43	17.44	5.56	

\*Significant at .05 level

Table 4 indicates that t value is 2.04, which is significant at .05 level. It shows that there was a difference in behavioural problems among students studying in different grades. Therefore, it can be inferred from the mean value that students studying in Stds 8 and 9 had more behavioural problems than those in Stds 10 and 11. Hence the null hypothesis which stated that grade would not significantly influence the behaviour problems of school students is rejected and an alternative hypothesis accepted.

**Table No.5 : Difference showing the influence of mother's occupational status on behavioural problems**

Variables	Mothers' occupations	n	Mean	S.D	t
Behavioural problems	Non-working	63	18.14	5.02	.97NS
	Working	36	19.39	4.94	

NS-Not Significant

Table 5 indicates that the t value is .97, which is not significant at any level. It shows that there was no difference between school students who have working mothers and those who have non-working mothers. Hence the null hypothesis which stated that mothers' occupations would not significantly influence behavioural problems of school students is accepted.

## Discussion

The present study has found that that parental warmth and affection, and behavioural problems in students, are negatively related to each other. This indicates that when parental warmth and affection increase, behavioural problems tend to decrease, which results in the lesser likelihood of behavioural problems surfacing among adolescents. The

present finding is supported by earlier studies, where it was reported that parental warmth and affection predict lower incidence of psychological maladjustment in adolescents, which is the ultimate cause of behavioural problems (Baumrind, 1991; Rohner, 1986). Chen, Rubin and Li (1995) also reported a negative relationship between parental warmth and emotional adjustment. When adolescents feel secure and loved by their parents, that affection encourages them, in turn, to continue to have a good relationship with their parents. Further, when they are supported by their parents, they find it easy to share their problems with them. This could, in all probability, be the reason for the negative relationship between parental warmth and affection and behavioural problems.

It is also found that there are no major differences between boys and girls when it comes to the kind of behavioural problems both face. In today's scenario, women's emancipation has made girls feel good about themselves and on par with boys, which instils in them high levels of confidence. Moreover, girls and boys today compete equally in all fields, with no discrimination whatsoever. Further, irrespective of gender, both boys and girls are exposed to the media and this exposure has, unquestionably, engendered a rise in instances of violent behaviour. In addition, in the majority of families studied, there are fewer than three children - due to which, possibly, equal focus and attention are devoted to both boys and girls, which also could be the reason for the incidence of similar levels of behaviour problems. However, girls are found to perceive that they received more parental warmth and affection than did boys. This can be attributed to the fact that girls are, almost always, emotionally more attached to their parents and have little difficulty expressing love and affection for them. In turn, they perceive warmth and affection being reciprocated by their parents. Therefore, girls could have perceived more parental warmth and affection than boys did.

A difference is found in behaviour problems, based on the grade in which the students are in. In the present study, it is found that students in Stds 8 and 9 tend to have more behavioural problems than those in Stds 10 and 11. This may perhaps be explained by the fact that students in

Stds 10 and 11 receive special parental care because of (the far-reaching impact, on their future, of the marks secured by them in) their public examinations. Further, they also tend to be rather more mature than middle school students. Right through the entire course of Stds 10 and 11, they tend to focus all of their attention on the immediate future and career, and thus end up concentrating more on studies so as to realize their career goals. As a result of this focus, students in Stds 10 and 11 are found to have relatively fewer behavioural problems than those in Stds 8 and 9.

The occupations of mothers have not influenced behavioural problems faced by school students. This can be attributed to the fact that both nonworking mothers and working mothers may not vary in the degree of affection and care they give their children. Given the exigencies of the present education system, students are pressurized not only to study and excel in school, but also give their best at institutes which offer coaching classes as a result, quite naturally, they get to spend very little time with their parents. Working and non- working mothers could spend only the same amount of time with their children. Therefore, the degree of parental monitoring and involvement is found to be similar among adolescents, regardless of whether the mothers in question are working or non-working. Hence, the mothers' occupations have not, in any way, influenced the behavioural problems of school students.

### **Conclusion**

The present study has identified the influence of parental warmth and affection on the behavioural problems of school students. The results revealed that parental warmth and affection was negatively related to behavioural problems. This study emphasizes the importance of firm and warm parenting, which helps in raising physically, mentally and emotionally healthy adolescents. With regard to gender differences, girls were found to have perceived more parental warmth and affection than boys did, whereas there was no gender difference when it came to behavioural problems. Further, students studying in Stds 8 and 9 had more behavioural problems than those in Stds 10 and 11. Finally, behavioural problems were found to be similar for both students with working mothers and those with non-working mothers.

### Limitations of the study

1. The sample selected for the study was not adequate to represent the entire school population.
2. Fathers' education, family income and other demographic factors were not considered in this study.

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