

Relationship between Parental Attachment and Interpersonal Dependency among Adolescents

Raphael U. Anike

Abstract

The study investigated relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents. A total of 100 participants comprising 50 male and 50 female adolescent students were selected. The participants were within the ages of 16-21 years with mean age of 17.4 and standard deviation of 1.3. They were selected by making use of available sample technique from the population of students attending Community Secondary School Obe and Community Secondary School Agbani in Nkanu West Local Government Area of Enugu State. The scale used in the study were Parental attachment questionnaire is a 25-item questionnaire designed by the researcher to measure the degree in which an individual maintain a close proximity with a parents or caregiver; and a 48-item inventory designed by Hirschfield, (1977) and validated for use with Nigerian samples by Makinde, (1999) to measure the thoughts, behaviour and feelings revolving around the need to associate with others. A survey design was used in this study; while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was applied as a Statistic to analyze the data in order to test the formulated hypothesis. A significant positive relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency was obtained $r(98) = .34, P < .01$. The findings were discussed in relation to literatures reviewed and suggestions made.

Keywords: Adolescence, Interpersonal Dependency, Parenting Styles, Attachment, Family.

Introduction

The transition from childhood to adolescence is characterized by the need to establish an identity that calls for autonomy and independence from parents, as suggested in the Eriksonian crisis of 'identity versus identity confusion. (Erikson, 1950; Santrock, 1997). Resolution of the crisis results in developing a sense of self in relation to others and to one's own internal thoughts and desires. However, previous studies have emphasized that secure attachment to parents may buffer emotional distress, facilitate social competence and enhance self-esteem (Santrock, 1997). Pubertal changes have been implicated in girls having a lower self-esteem than boys, which reaches a low point between ages 12-13 years (Coopersmith, 1990; Demir & Tarhan, 2001). The perception of being an incompetent or rejected person may manifest into feelings of loneliness (Demir & Tarhan, 2001).

Parents furnish children with demonstrations and working models of how to organize their relationships with others and their representations of themselves (Bowlby, (1973; 1982). Parents who provide children with secure attachment relationships simultaneously provide them with the assurance that they are trustworthy and worthy of being loved and cared for (Bowlby, 1973). As they mature, these children are likely to become self-confident and healthy adolescents (Bowlby, 1982). Sample studies provide evidence for the link between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Coopersmith, 1967; Lapsley, Rice, & Fitzgerald, 1990; McCormick & Kennedy, 1994). For example, Armsden and Greenberg, (1987) found that parental attachment contributed positively to interpersonal dependency and negatively to measures of depression, anxiety, and feelings of alienation. Thus, parental attachment appears to enhance adolescents' well-being by increasing their self-esteem and diminishing feelings of depression. However, these studies do not elucidate which mechanisms link parental attachment to interpersonal dependency which is the main focus of the investigation.

Parental attachment is a developmental phenomenon where children develop fondness based on proximity or close relationship with their parents or caregiver. This behavior often extend to dependency syndrome where children depend on their parents or caregiver in making decisions that may affect their social life, marital life, or in those case their career choice. Adolescents as a bridge between childhood and adulthood manifest this behaviour, hence, interpersonal dependency not only on their parents but also across other significant figures. In view of this, parental attachment may serve as an indicator towards expressing interpersonal dependency, and on the other hand children who seem to be interpersonally dependence are likely to show some elements of parental attachment behaviours. Therefore, the study intends to find out if ill there be a relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents?

Literature Review

Research on attachment theory has grown since the concept was originally proposed by Bowlby, (1969) and advanced by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall, (1978). Bowlby suggested infants instinctually attach to their caretakers in order to maintain proximity. Infant interpersonal behaviour is adapted in order to meet needs of closeness. The maintenance of closeness to the caretaker is necessary for infant survival (i.e., being fed, protected). Bowlby, (1969) conceptualized attachment behaviour as an internally-motivated, biological function that serves to protect the attached individual from psychological and physical harm. Through infant development, children develop internal working models based on interactions with attachment figures, thus developing a sense of relating to others, self, and the world (Bowlby, 1969). Theoretically, these early interactions and subsequent internal representations affect how the child will later understand the interpersonal domain, as well as how he/she will behave in new relationships.

Bowlby, (1973), originally proposed attachment theory and defined attachment as “any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual, usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser”. He conceived the attachment system as an evolutionary mechanism developed for the survival of the species by helping offspring maintain close proximity to a caregiver. His theory came from observations of nonhuman primates, in which he observed behaviors geared towards the young maintaining contact with the caregiver. He also observed similar behavior among orphans in hospitals. If the young were separated from their caregivers they would exhibit distressful behavior and begin to actively seek out the caregiver.

Working models provide the foundation upon which attachment styles develop. Attachment styles are derived from the work of Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall, (1978). Ainsworth et al., (1978) developed an experiment called the Strange Situation experiment. In this experiment several steps were involved, including observations of the child’s behavior; with the parent, when the parent was not present, and when a stranger was present (both with and without the parent there). The absence of the parent aroused separation distress for the infant. But Ainsworth et al. noticed that the intensity of the separation distress were different for different infants, and was related to the strength of the attachment of the infant to the parent/caregiver. The results from this experiment lead to the development of attachment styles between the infant and caregiver.

Interpersonal dependency, like attachment, is a particular personality dimension that can have a significant impact on relationships. Dependency is also a characteristic of many individuals who present for psychological treatment. Although there has been considerable research conducted regarding the construct of dependency, dependent personality disorder (DPD) has been neglected in research in comparison to other personality disorders (Gude, Hoffart, Hedley& Ro, 2004). Before launching into a discussion of previous research and theory on interpersonal dependency, it is important to acknowledge the complex nature of the construct and its measurement. Traditionally, interpersonal dependency has been viewed as a distinct personality style. Personality traits are typically seen as chronic and stable throughout an individual’s lifetime, and they may manifest themselves in both adaptive and unhealthy ways. In the dimensional view of personality, traits exist on

a continuum, ranging from healthy to dysfunctional. For example, an individual with dependency who is motivated to receive support and protection from others can form close, nurturing relationships, develop unhealthy, one-sided relationships, or have both types of relationships (Bornstein, 1997). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-4th edition (*DSM-IV*; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) emphasizes this point by stating: Many individuals display dependent personality traits. Only when these traits are inflexible, maladaptive, and persisting and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress do they constitute dependent personality disorder. As with many psychological constructs, the multifaceted nature of dependency is often overlooked. Rather, dependency is viewed categorically as present or absent, or as pathological or healthy. In the same vein, maladaptive dependent behaviors tend to be generalized into an overarching dependent personality style.

In fact, dependency has been defined, studied, and expressed in various ways, including as a personality style, traits, behaviors, and affect (McBride & Bagby, 2006). Most individuals exhibit some type of dependent behavior in specific relationships and behave independently in other relationships. Therefore, characterizing an individual's personality as definitively dependent may not be accurate. In some cases, labeling the behavior may be more appropriate. In addition, individuals who may be labeled dependent may not always exhibit stereotypically dependent behaviors. For example, individuals with dependency are often expected to be passive and submissive. Some research (Bornstein, Riggs, Hill & Calabrese, 1996) has found that individuals with dependency will engage in active behavior in order to please an authority figure. In this case, the need or goal of the individual with dependency remains the same, but the behavior would not be classified as dependent.

Empirical Review

Attachment theory can serve as a theoretical framework to study significant relationships, which include parent and peer relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Nickerson & Nagle, 2005). According to Bowlby (1977, 1988), attachment is adaptive and significant because it involves a process of natural selection that yields survival advantage. From early experiences between infants and caregivers, infants are believed to adapt to caregivers' behavioral patterns and to develop internal mental representations of themselves and their surroundings. In this manner, experiences with caregivers influence the degree to which infants become securely attached to their caregivers.

As children mature, they increasingly seek the company of their peers, presumably incorporating peer behaviors into their internal working models, based on their earlier attachments to parents (Crowell & Waters, 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). In this manner, parent and peer interactions may interrelate, leading to more generalized working models, which influence individuals' subsequent adaptation (Kerns, Klepac, & Cole, 1996; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999).

According to Bowlby, (1988), securely attached infants are more likely to develop generally positive internal working models of others as trustworthy and available. These models subsequently guide individuals in making judgments about their worlds. Attachments formed during infancy are not necessarily transient Bowlby, (1988) or limited to the mother–infant bond (Ainsworth, 1989; Rice, 1990; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). Indeed, attachment models formed during infancy may persist throughout an individual's lifespan and generalize to relationships with others (e.g., peers).

The functional importance of parent attachment relationships has been demonstrated in numerous studies. Adolescents who are securely attached to their parents display higher LS (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Nickerson & Nagle, 2004); academic success (Bell, Allen, Hauser, & O'Conner, 1996; Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994); interpersonal functioning (Black & McCartney, 1997); self-efficacy (Arbona & Power, 2003; Thompson, 1999); and lower psychological distress (Bradford & Lyddon, 1994). Similarly, the functional importance of peer attachments in adolescence has been documented in numerous

studies. For example, secure peer attachments are related to adolescents' global self-esteem (Black & McCartney, 1997); academic achievement (Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1996); and perceived quality of life (Green, Forehand, Beck, & Vosk, 1980).

Zuroff and Fitzpatrick, (1995) found evidence of the association between dependency and anxious attachment in two studies using undergraduates in serious romantic relationships. The DEQ was used to assess dependency, while the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS); (Collins & Read, 1990) was used to assess attachment. Similarly, Darcy, Davila and Beck, (2005) reported social anxiety was positively associated with preoccupied attachment in an undergraduate sample. Adult attachment was measured by a self-report measure highly correlated with the AAS, the Relationship Style Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The authors theorized that preoccupied attachment is indicative of interpersonal dependence. More recently, McBride, Zuroff, and Bacchioni, (2006) hypothesized that maladaptive dependency is associated with insecure attachment, while adaptive dependency is associated with secure attachment. They used the DEQ and RSQ with both student and outpatient samples. Their results were mixed, with adaptive and maladaptive dependency being significantly associated with all types of attachment, in both clinical and non-clinical samples. These findings indicate the complexity of the relationship between attachment style and interpersonal dependency.

Bornstein, (1993) asserted that most individuals develop a degree of dependency. Children must be dependent on their parents to have their needs met. Ideally, children create healthy internal representations of their parents and are able to mature and individuate. Several researchers (Bornstein, 1993; Livesley, 1990) have attempted to delineate between these two interpersonal constructs. The main difference appears to be to whom the maladaptive behaviours are directed. Dependency may be defined as generalized behaviour for gaining approval and nurturance from others, while attachment behaviors are aimed at attaining proximity to a specific individual, an attachment figure. Bretherton and Waters, (1985) stated that attachment is distinct from dependency because it serves a biological function, while dependency does not.

In summary, insecure attachment and dependency have been found to be related to somewhat similar behaviour patterns but they do not always occur together. Individuals who develop secure attachment in childhood may be less susceptible to the development of adult dependency. In contrast, children who develop insecure attachment styles, particularly anxious or preoccupied attachment, may generalize their difficulties with specific attachment figures to more global interpersonal problems based on dependency. However, insecure attachment does not always indicate the development of dysfunctional dependency. Attachment and dependency seem to have a strong theoretical relationship that has not been definitively supported by previous research. In addition, both constructs are measured using numerous methods. Both attachment and dependency have been measured with structured, self-report formats, as well as through less structured formats, such as interviews and storytelling techniques.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis stated below was tested:

- There will be no significant relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents.

Method

Participants

A total of 100 participants comprising 50 male and 50 female adolescent students were selected. The participants were within the ages of 16-21 years with mean age of 17.4 and standard deviation of 1.3. They were selected by making use of available sample technique from the population of students attending Community Secondary School Obe and Community Secondary School Agbani in Nkanu West Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Instrument

Two sets of instrument were administrated in this study. They include parental attachment questionnaire and Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (IDI).

Parental attachment questionnaire is a 25-item questionnaire designed by the researcher to measure the degree in which an individual maintain a close proximity with a parents or caregiver. Thus, the items of the questionnaire were worded positively and negatively with positive items scored as follows, 5 points for strongly agree, 4 points for agree, 3 points for undecided, 2 points for disagree, and 1 point for strongly disagree, while reverse is the case for negative worded items. The positive worded items are items 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, and 25. On the other hand the negative worded items are 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, and 23. A highest possible score of 125 and a least possible score of 25 is expected by any given respondent. Example of items in parental attachment questionnaire are: My parents respects my feeling; I feel it's no use letting my feelings show around my parents and When I am angry about something, my parents tries to be understanding. An established Alpha Coefficient of .70 was obtained by the researcher in a pilot study using 100 participants from the population of Model Comprehensive Secondary School Agbani.

The second scale used is the Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (IDI) which is a 48-item inventory designed by Hirschfield, (1977) and validated for use with Nigerian samples by Makinde, (1999) to measure the thoughts, behaviour and feelings revolving around the need to associate with others. It is scored on a 4-point scale ranging from 1-4. Sample items 10, 23 and 44 are reverse score items while all others are direct score items. To obtain the overall score on IDI the three sub scale score are added together. Separate norms have been reported for male and female Nigerian samples as follows: males 121.55, females = 123.30 (Makinde, 1999). The Nigerian norms or means scores are the basis for interpreting the score of the participants. Scores higher than the norms indicate overall high interpersonal dependency, high need for affiliation and high on the typical characteristics of the subscale.

Procedure

A total of 140 copies of both inventories parental attachment questionnaire and Interpersonal Dependency questionnaire were randomly distributed within a period of two weeks across the target population. The administration of the questionnaire took the form of group testing in their respective classrooms with the help of their respective form teachers. Thus, 119 copies of the questionnaire were collected and 100 copies that are correctly filled were scored and analyzed and only 19 copies were discarded.

Design and Statistics

A survey design was used in this study. This is because the copies of the questionnaire were distributed across the target population without manipulation of the experimental variables. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Statistic was applied to analyze the data in order to test the formulated hypothesis.

Results

Table 1: Summary table of means on the relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents.

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Interpersonal Dependency	50	118.00	44.00	162.00	106.7300	25.78705	664.972
Parental Attachment	50	95.00	23.00	118.00	74.2300	13.27888	176.329
Age	100	5.00	16.00	21.00	17.6000	1.09819	1.206
Valid N (listwise)	100						

From table 1 above, participants obtained a group mean of 74.23 and a standard deviation of 13.28 on parental attachment questionnaire, while a group means of 106.73 and a standard deviation of 25.79 were obtained on interpersonal dependency questionnaire. Hence, this individual deviation from the mean seem to be appropriate to the means indicating possibilities of equal rise or equality in variation of scores. This relative equality means that they are either increasing or decreasing in the same direction. However, a correlation summary is needed to ascertain whether it is really a positive relationship.

Table 2: Summary table of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on the relationship between relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents
Correlations

		Interpersonal dependency	Parental Attachment
INTERPERSONAL DEPENDENCY	Pearson Correlation	1	.341**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	132329.420	23206.420
	Covariance	664.972	116.615
	N	200	200
PARENTAL ATTACHMENT	Pearson Correlation	.341**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	23206.420	35089.420
	Covariance	116.615	176.329
	N	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 above indicates a significant positive relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency, $r = .34, P < .01$. This means that parental attachment and interpersonal dependency are either increasing or decreasing in the same direction. Thus, a positive relationship hereby exists showing that hypothesis stated above “there will be no significant relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents” is hereby rejected.

Discussion

The finding of this study revealed that the hypothesis tested which stated that “there will be no significant relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents” was rejected. This means that there is a significant positive relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents. This is based on the fact that the null hypothesis stated was rejected. However, there is an existing relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents. This shows that parental attachment was found to correlate positively in relation to interpersonal dependency among adolescents. In relation to the outcome of this investigation parental attachment was confirmed to be significantly positively related to interpersonal dependency. Hence, adolescents’ students that scored high on parental attachment were observed to experience high interpersonal dependency. On the other hand adolescent students that experience high interpersonal dependency tend to score high on parental attachment.

Rubin, (1985) postulated that women who are dependent on men financially will eventually become emotionally dependent as well. Chronister (2007) asserted that abusive partners create both economic and emotional dependence in their female victims. Economic dependence indicates that an individual depends on another for

financial support, while emotional dependence indicates that an individual has an intense need for nurturance and support from another, even when fully capable of functioning autonomously (Bornstein, 1993).

Bornstein, (2005) reported that prior investigations have found that a woman's economic dependency plays a larger role in her potential for becoming a victim of abuse than does a woman's emotional dependency. For example, Rusbult and Martz, (1995) found that higher economic dependency was associated with a decreased likelihood of leaving abusive partners in a sample of 100 women presenting at a battered women's shelter.

Implications of the Finding

In view of the finding of this study, one may observe that parental attachment only did correlate with interpersonal dependency. There may be other factors like personal experience and personality type that have caused the outcome of the finding. The finding of this study indicates that secure individuals are not lonely and have the greatest ability for intimate relationships because they possess the ability to cover the various dimensions of intimate relationships, such as self-disclosure and reciprocity. On the other hand the finding of this study contributed to the body of knowledge in the area of parental attachment and interpersonal dependency.

Limitations of the Study

One major short coming of this study was the use of small sample out of the myriad of adolescent students in secondary schools. This is because the researcher within the limited time sampled from adolescents who were ready to participate in the investigation without contaminating the responses.

Summary and Conclusion

A significant positive relationship was observed between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents. Based on the outcome of this study the researcher hereby concludes that there is an existing positive relationship between parental attachment and interpersonal dependency among adolescents.

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