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Fathering preschoolers and adolescents: A comparative analysis of father-child relationship

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Abstract

Parent-child relationship is the most unique and strongest of all the human relationship. Children require the care and involvement of both the mothers as well as the fathers in order to develop a wholistic personality. The present research assesses the role of fathers in the parenting process. The father-child relationship is also analyzed according the age of the children. A comparative analysis of father-preschooler and father-adolescent relationship was carried out. The total sample for the present study consisted of 100 fathers, out of these 50 fathers were those who had at least one preschooler and rest 50 fathers were those who had at least one adolescent child. The entire sample was selected through random sampling technique. A standardized Parent Child Relationship questionnaire was used for data collection. The results reveal that most fathers shared average to below average attachment, average discipline practices and relation frustration, average to below average involvement, average parenting confidence with reference to their children. The sample fathers scored moderate or average score on most dimensions of parent-child relationship, indicating that the relationship was reasonably stable and regular in quality. Statistically significant differences were noted in parenting of fathers of preschoolers and fathers of adolescents on four dimensions namely, attachment, involvement, parenting confidence and relation frustration. The results highlight that the age of children in one determining factor affecting the father-child relationship.

Keywords: Fathers, Preschoolers, Adolescents, Relationship

Introduction

The perceptions and practices associated with fathering are changing rapidly in India. Traditional Indian notions endorsed the fathers' role as a provider, protector, teacher and moral guardian to children (Kane, 1974) ^[7]. Within the patriarchal family system in India, everyday care of young children remained primarily the mother's responsibility. Father's maintained a distant authoritative role, rather than an affective one (Kakar, 1981) ^[8]. However, with the changing socio-cultural context, the role of fathers in parenting has also started receiving importance. After revisiting earlier writings, Roopnarine and Suppal (2003) ^[10] concluded that today Indian fathers are more centrally involved and capable of responding to children than previously asserted. With more middle-Indian constitution and worldwide media promoting gender equality, the demand for a man who has knowledge, attitude and skills to share co-parenting responsibilities is growing in dual-earner families (Bharat, 2002) ^[3]. Rajadhyaksha and Smita (2004) ^[9] noted that children and women now have higher expectations of men in terms of warmth, care, understanding, and support and many fathers also endorse the importance of these traits.

Most fathers in the urban contexts of western India (Mumbai, Baroda and Jaipur) today expect an ideal father to be aware of and address their children's needs, and to be a friend, teacher and guide to their children (Saraff and Srivastava, 2008) ^[12]. Research studies with Indian fathers report a host of positive fathering ideals, such as guiding children's education, becoming more open and expressive, adopting less strict discipline measures, assigning more importance to children and to their fathering role, prioritizing communication, with their children and engaging children in extracurricular activities.

Mother is considered as primary caregiver and mostly fathers are not very much involved in child care until child reaches the age of five or start schooling. Other family members are involved in child care but the importance of father involvement is not much studied in our society. People are not much aware about the importance of father care in early years that

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enhance children better outcomes in later life.

Fathers apart from their basic role as breadwinners, are participating directly in child care, they spend some time with their children by talking to them or playing with them. In the socio-cultural context the high level of male involvement especially in care taking outside the house can be seen as coping mechanism with tradition of female seclusion (John and Aslam, 1995) [6]. Fathers are involved in their children's lives in a multitude of ways that go beyond the traditional roles of economic provider and playmate.

Fathers' interactions exert a powerful influence on every domain of their children's functioning beginning at infancy. In the first few days of life, many newborn infants turn their heads preferentially to their father's voices versus the voice of stranger. Fathers' involvement is of a different nature than mothers' involvement in terms of relative frequency. Fathers devote more time to playing with their children than do mothers. When children are young (0-4 years old), fathers tend to engage in more tactile physical and stimulating activities. Fathers also have a strong influence on their children's gender role development and are important role models for both girls and boys (Williams and Radin, 1999) [14]. Most of the studies looking at the attachment of fathers to their infant and the development of the father in the child's early life show that when fathers are a significant part of the child's life from birth, the children score higher on intelligence test than children whose fathers are less involved.

During the period of adolescence especially the fathers can contribute in significant ways to promote the formation of an identity among their children. Fathers can also help adolescents with the basics of emotional intelligence by: learning how to recognize, manage and harness their feelings; empathizing; and handling the feelings that rise in relationships. The impact of such parenting is 'extraordinarily sweeping'. The advantages are social, cognitive and biological. Children who grow up in this environment have lower level of stress hormones and other indicators of emotional arousal, a pattern that may well enhance physical health. Because parenting is crucial to a child's development, it is very important to carefully choose a style of that will provide discipline, love, support and guidance to create a healthy and happy child (Andrews and Wilding, 2004) [2].

With this as background the present study has been designed to assess and compare the fathers' role in parenting their preschoolers and adolescents. The research looks into the various aspects of fathering was influenced by the age of the child/children.

Research Methodology

The methodological framework for the study is presented as under:

Sample: The total sample for the present study consisted of 100 fathers, out of these 50 fathers were those who had at least one preschooler and rest 50 fathers were those who had at least one adolescent child. All selected fathers were government teachers and belonged to Khour Block of Jammu district.

Criteria for Sample Selection

Only those fathers were selected who had at least one preschooler or one adolescent child.

All sample fathers were government teachers for at least past 2 years.

Only those male government school teachers were selected who were at least graduates.

All selected fathers should be local resident of Khour Block.

Sampling Technique: The entire sample was selected randomly through multi-stage sampling. A list of government schools of Khour Block, Jammu was prepared. Personal visits were made to the schools and the concerned principal was contacted. They were required to provide the list of teachers who matched the sampling criteria. Interactions were made with the identified fathers. They were explained the objectives before initiation of the process of data collection and fathers fulfilling the sampling criteria were selected.

Tools Used For Data Collection: Parenting Relationship Questionnaire developed by Kamphaus and Reynolds (2006) was used for the data collection. The questionnaire is designed to assess the parent child relationship and can be administered to mothers and fathers or care givers of children aged 2 to 18 years.

Data Analysis: The data was analyzed using statistical techniques. Difference in the variables was tested by using 't' test, chi-square and relationship among variables was tested by using co-efficient of correlation.

Results & Discussion

The findings of the study along with their discussion are presented as under:

Background Profile of Sample Fathers and Their Children

The demographic details of the sample fathers and their children are presented in the following sections:

Age of Sample Fathers

Table 1: Age of Sample Fathers

Age (in years)	Fathers of Preschoolers		Fathers of Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
25-30	4	8	-	-	4	4
30-35	26	52	1	2	27	27
35-40	18	36	5	10	23	23
40-45	2	4	15	30	17	17
45-50	-	-	25	50	25	25
50-55	-	-	4	8	4	4
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Mean age of the sample fathers of preschoolers= 34.06 ± 3.45

Mean age of the sample fathers of adolescents= 44.16 ± 4.02

Overall mean of sample fathers= 39.11 ± 6.30

Table 1 reveals that sample fathers were aged between the 25-55 years. Most of them were in the age group of 30-35 (27%); 45-50 (25%) and 35-40 years (23%). As expected fathers of preschoolers were younger with a mean age of 34.06 ± 3.45 years than the fathers of adolescents who had a mean age of 44.16 ± 4.02 of years.

Educational Status of Sample Fathers

Table 2: Educational Status of Sample Fathers

Qualification	Fathers of Preschoolers		Fathers of Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Graduate	5	10	-	-	5	5
Post Graduate	6	12	11	22	17	17
Graduate and B.Ed.	3	9	10	20	13	13
Post Graduate and B.Ed.	19	38	22	44	41	41
Post Graduate and M.Ed.	17	34	7	14	24	24
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Table 2 indicates that the 41% of the sample fathers were post graduates. None of them were below graduation and most of them had a professional degree to their credit i.e, B.Ed. and M.Ed.

Age of Children

Table 3: Age of Children

Age (in years)	Preschoolers		Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
2-6	50	100	-	-	50	50
12-15	-	-	27	54	27	27
15-18	-	-	23	46	23	23
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Table 3 reveals that the sample preschoolers were in the age group of 2-6 years (50%). On the other hand, the sample adolescents were either in the age group of 12-15 years (27%) or 15-18 years (23%).

Educational Status of the Children

Table 4: Educational Status of the Children

Level of schooling	Preschoolers		Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Preschoolers	50	100	-	-	50	50
7th-9th standard	-	-	29	58	29	29
10th -12th standard	-	-	21	42	21	21
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Table 4 indicates that all sample preschoolers were attending some type of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Center and on the other hand, most of the adolescents were either studying in the class 7th-9th (29%) or 10th-12th (21%).

Father-Child Relationship

The father-child relationship was assessed on the dimensions namely attachment, discipline practices, involvement, parental confidence and relation frustration. The results obtained are discussed as below:

Attachment between Fathers and Children

Table 5: Attachment between Fathers and Children

Levels	Fathers of Preschoolers		Fathers of Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lower extreme	17	34	6	12	23	23
Below average	16	32	14	28	30	30
Average	15	30	24	48	39	39
Above average	2	4	5	10	7	7
Upper extreme	-	-	1	2	1	1
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Chi-square for attachment between fathers of preschoolers and adolescents = 9.757, df = 4, table value = 9.49, *significant at 5%

Table 5 shows the level of attachment between the fathers and their children. Overall, 39% of fathers had average attachment with their respective children. This was followed by 30% who had below average attachment and 23% who had lower extreme levels of attachment with their children. Most fathers of preschoolers (34%) shared lower extreme attachment with their children, 32% below average attachment average attachment and 30% average attachment with their children. Whereas, in case of fathers of adolescents most of them (48%) scored average and (28%) scored below average in attachment.

Statistically more fathers of adolescents (48%) showed average attachment with their children while most fathers of preschoolers (34%) had lower levels of attachment. The result indicates that the attachment become stronger with the growing age of children probably because young children are still seen as a responsibility of the mothers rather than the fathers.

Discipline Practices of the Sample Fathers

Table 6: Discipline Practices of the Sample Fathers

Levels	Fathers of Preschoolers		Fathers of Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lower extreme	2	4	1	2	3	3
Below average	7	14	11	22	18	18
Average	39	78	36	72	75	75
Above average	2	4	2	4	4	4
Upper extreme	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Chi-square for discipline practices between fathers of preschoolers and adolescents =1.342, df = 3, table value =7.81, insignificant at 5%.

Table 6 indicates the level of discipline practices, which reflect a general sense of the parent in the establishment of rules for their children. Majority of the sample fathers 75%, (78% of fathers of preschoolers and 72% of fathers of adolescents) scored average on discipline. Another 18% scored below average on discipline practices (14% of fathers of preschoolers and 22% of fathers of adolescents). This indicates that the sample fathers were not too strict about discipline of their children. Further, it was found that the discipline of fathers did not vary according to the age of their children. Chi-square calculation also shows that there is no significant difference in the discipline practices of fathers having preschoolers and adolescents.

Involvement of Fathers with their Children

Table 7: Involvement of Fathers with their Children

Levels	Fathers of Preschoolers		Fathers of Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lower extreme	8	16	-	-	8	8
Below average	19	38	7	14	26	26
Average	20	40	34	68	54	54
Above average	3	6	7	14	10	10
Upper extreme	-	-	2	4	2	2
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Chi-square for involvement among fathers = 20.768, df = 4, table value = 9.49, **significant at 5%.

As far as, parental involvement with their children was concerned most sample fathers (54%) showed average involvement. While 26% of fathers (38% of fathers of preschoolers and 14%of fathers of adolescents) had below average involvement. Many fathers reported that in managing their jobs they tend to get very little opportunity for interacting with their own children. Only two fathers had reported having upper extreme involvement with their children. Statistically there was significant difference in the involvement of fathers of preschoolers and adolescents. Comparatively more fathers of adolescents had average to above average involvement in their children’s activities rather than fathers of preschoolers, who also showed below average and lower extreme involvement with their children. This indicates that as

children grow older fathers find it more convenient to get involved in the lives of their teenage children.

2.4. Parenting Confidence

Table 8: Parenting Confidence

Levels	Fathers of Preschoolers		Fathers of Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lower extreme	2	4	-	-	2	2
Below average	9	18	15	30	24	24
Average	29	58	34	68	63	63
Above average	10	20	1	2	11	11
Upper extreme	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Chi-square for parenting confidence among fathers = 11.26, df =3, table value = 7.81, **significant at 5%.

Table 8 shows the level of parenting confidence; which refers to parents feeling of confidence when making parenting decisions. Most of the sample fathers 63% (58% of fathers of preschoolers and 68% of fathers of adolescents) had average parental confidence. This was followed by 24% fathers who had below average parental confidence.

Calculation of chi-square indicates significant difference in the level of parenting confidence of fathers of two groups. The fathers of adolescents had more parenting confidence than the fathers of preschoolers. Probably as fathers continued to parent their children they become more confident and sure of the decisions that they take for their children and their welfare.

Relation Frustration of Fathers

Table 9: Relation Frustration of Fathers

Levels	Fathers of Preschoolers		Fathers of Adolescents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lower extreme	3	6	2	4	5	5
Below average	6	12	5	10	11	11
Average	26	52	40	80	66	66
Above average	4	8	3	6	7	7
Upper extreme	11	22	-	-	11	11
Total	50	100	50	100	100	100

Chi-square for relation frustration among fathers = 14.403, df = 4, table value = 9.49, *significant at 5%.

Table 9 depicts the level of relation frustration between the fathers and their children. Most of the sample fathers, 66% (52% of fathers of preschoolers and 80% of fathers of adolescents) had average relation frustration. Another 7% (8% of fathers of preschoolers and 6% of fathers of adolescents) scored above average on relation frustration and 11% (12% of fathers of preschoolers and 10% of fathers of adolescents) scored below average on relation frustration. Overall fathers ranged from below average to average to above average on this dimension of parenting. Comparatively, fathers of preschoolers were more frustrated than the fathers of adolescents and the difference was significant statistically. These fathers reported that managing younger children is a more demanding job. Mothers are more capable of dealing younger children and hence they were more frustrated when it came to dealing with preschoolers.

Conclusion & Summary

The family has the highest effect on the individuals and it can mould their behaviours at any moment (Sanaei, 1991) [11].

Numerous studies have shown that parent's interaction with their children, stringent discipline, unanimity, carelessness or sincerity have deep and continuous consequence in their emotional life and provide the ground for achievements or failure in different fields (Goleman, 1998) [4]. Empirical evidence has proved that fathers' role in parenting is of equal importance. The quality of father-child relationship does impact the socio-emotional development of the children. In fact, when a father adopts an emotion-coaching style of fathering, it has an extremely positive impact on his child's emotional development (Gottman *et al.* 1998; Stover, 2003) [5, 13].

Comparative analysis of fathers' role in parenting preschoolers and adolescents was carried out and the results reveal that most fathers shared average to below average attachment, average discipline practices and relation frustration, average to below average involvement, average parenting confidence with reference to their children. The sample fathers scored moderate or average score on most dimensions of parent-child relationship indicates that fathers of current generation tend to value the relationship they shared with their children. They are involved in the everyday lives of their children in one way or the other and hence tend to derive at least some amount of satisfaction from their parental role. Fathers were attached to their children and even tried to participate in their everyday activities, breaking the general notion that fathers have little or no idea about the children's lives. Sample fathers were aware of their children's activities and behaviours and hence also faced some relational frustrations.

Use of statistical procedures point that there are significant differences in parenting of fathers of preschoolers and fathers of adolescents on four dimensions namely, attachment, involvement, parenting confidence and relation frustration. More fathers of adolescents showed average attachment with their children than the fathers of preschoolers. The results pointed to the fact that probably with the age father-child relationship become stronger. Comparatively fathers of adolescents are more involved in their children's activities rather than the fathers of preschoolers. Acharya and Shalini (2013) [1] also found that fathers are more involved in the activities of their adolescent children. Most of the fathers of adolescents showed average parenting confidence than the fathers of preschoolers. Fathers of adolescents were more confident of their parenting and probably as they continued to parent their children they become more confident and sure. Comparatively the fathers of preschoolers are more frustrated than the fathers of adolescents. These results highlight the significance of children's age as a determining factor influencing the relationship that fathers tend to share with their children.

The findings of the study highlight the need for nurturing and developing better parenting models for the fathers. Many of the fathers find it difficult to connect to their children because of their socialization, own childhood experiences and occupational requirements. However, at the same time researches have indicated the advantages of fathers' involvement in parenting for the children, mothers as well as the fathers themselves. Results of the current research have also highlighted that fathers became more confident in parenting adolescents than their young children. During teenage the relationship between children and fathers tends to improve in quality, probably because of experience and familiarity. If fathers get training in parenting then probably their relationship with their children can improve and can become more stable and effective from the very beginning. Greater involvement and participation in the parenting process

from the conception of the baby itself can help develop greater confidence in the fathers and hence improve the relationship as well.

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